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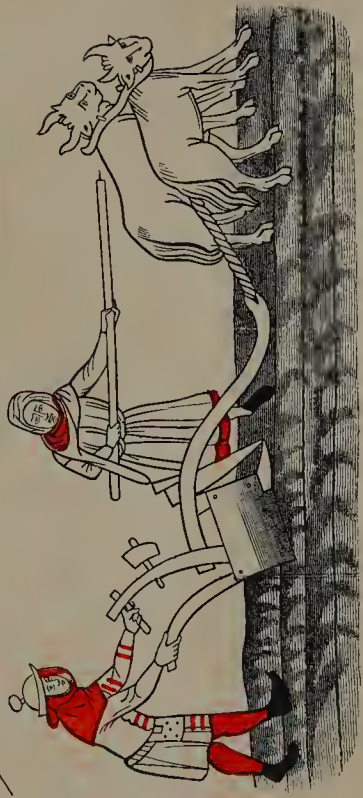
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THE VISION OF PIERS THE PLOW-
MAN BY WILLIAM LANGLAND

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THE VISION OF PIERS
THE PLOWMAN BY
WILLIAM LANGLAND: DONE
INTO MODERN ENGLISH BY
PROF. W. W. SKEAT.

CHATTO AND WINDUS: LONDON
1931

“ HE THAT WROTE THE SATYR OF PIERS PLOUGHMAN . BENT
HIMSELFE WHOLY TO TAXE THE DISORDERS OF THAT AGE.”

G. Puttenham.

“ OUR AUTHOR’S INDIGNANT SPIRIT, INDEED, IS VEHEMENTLY
DEMOCRATIC. HE DARED TO WRITE WHAT MANY TREMBLED TO
WHISPER. GENIUS REFLECTS THE SUPPRESSEO FEELINGS OF ITS AGE.”

I. D’Israeli.

“ THE VISION . . . DERIVES ITS INTEREST . . . FROM ITS CON-
NEXION WITH THE ACTUAL LIFE AND OPINION OF ITS TIME, INTO WHICH
IT GIVES US A CLEARER INSIGHT THAN MANY A LABOURED HISTORY.”

G. P. Marsh.

Printed in Great Britain.

INTRODUCTION

William Langland. Very little is certainly known concerning the author of "The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman." If we may accept as real the various notes which the author has left us concerning himself, and such other traditions as seem to be more or less acceptable, we may well suppose that his name was William Langland, and that he was born about 1332 at Cleobury Mortimer, in Shropshire. His father may have been a farmer who at one time held land at Shipton-under-Wychwood, in Oxfordshire. He was probably educated at Malvern, and at any rate was familiar with the Malvern Hills. Later in life, he came to London, and lived for many years (if we may trust his own account) in Cornhill, where he resided with his wife Kitte and his daughter Calote. His allusions to London life are numerous. He seems to have been in minor orders, and to have earned a

precarious living by singing ‘the *placebo, dirige*, and seven psalms’ for the good of men’s souls. If (as he says) he was married, this circumstance may explain why he never rose in the Church. It is almost certain, from a close comparison of the two works, that, besides the “Vision,” he wrote a poem with reference to the expected deposition of Richard II. in 1399, at which date he was in Bristol. This poem, which has been named “Richard the Redeless,” *i. e.* devoid of counsel, is incomplete, and we hear no more of its author afterwards. It is probable that he died about the year 1400, which is also the date of the death of Chaucer. He tells us that he was tall of stature, whence he gained the epithet of “Long Will.”

The Vision concerning Piers the Plowman, &c. This is often spoken of by the title of “The Vision of Piers the Plowman,” or “of Piers Plowman,” where, strictly speaking, the word *of* is used in the sense of “concerning.” The title, in Latin, is “*Visio Willelmi de Petro (le) Plowman.*” But the mistake of taking *of* in the sense of “written by” is so common and usual, that most writers (even good critics) have imagined “Piers Plowman” to be the name of the author rather than of the subject; much as if we should speak of “Sir Thopas” as having written the famous “Rime” which goes by his name, or should attribute the Pilgrim’s Progress to

Christian the pilgrim. The reader will avoid this error if he understands that "Piers the Plowman" is only one of the rather numerous subjects described in the writer's "Vision;" that the said Piers is the personification of a thoroughly honest head-labourer on a farm; and further, that the author does not hesitate, at times, to identify his hero with the highest type of humanity, as seen in the divine Person of Christ. Whenever, in quoting from the poem, we use the common expression, "as Piers Plowman says," we really run the possible risk of including Christ amongst the Middle English authors of the fourteenth century. The expression, that such and such a statement occurs in "Piers Plowman" is, however, defensible, especially if rightly understood; we might say the same of "Sir Thopas."

Further, the title *Visio de Petro Plowman* is the title of only a *portion* of the poem, viz. of the portion here reproduced in a more modern version. It is followed, in the MSS., by other Visions, called collectively "Visio de Do-wel, Do-bet, and Do-best;" where *bet* signifies "better." The whole poem is properly named *Liber* (not *Visio*) *de Petro Plowman*; and is of considerable length.

The Three Forms of the Poem. The poem is extant in upwards of fifty MSS., and in various forms.

The chief forms, in which many MSS. agree, are three, which I have named, for clearness, the A-text, the B-text, and the C-text; they are of different dates, and vary as to their length. The first (A-text) seems to have been written in 1362. It contains the Vision of Piers the Plowman, consisting of a Prologue and 8 Passus (or cantos); and the Vision of Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, consisting of a Prologue and 3 Passus. In this version, the fable of the rats and the cat (p. 9, ll. 146—207 below) does not appear; and the character of Wrath in Passus V is also omitted. The second (B-text) seems to have been written in 1377, and extended to a much greater length; in this, the Vision of Piers Plowman consists of a Prologue and 7 Passus (as here printed); but it is supplemented by a Prologue and 6 Passus of Do-wel, a Prologue and 3 Passus of Do-bet, and a Prologue and 1 Passus of Do-best; the whole being called Liber de Piers Plowman. The third (C-text) is of still greater length, and is of later date. On the whole, the second (B-text) is most characteristic of the author, and the Vision of Piers the Plowman (without the supplementary Visions) is here reproduced from that version, but rendered into modern English, as being a fair specimen of the author's work. The same specimen has already been issued, in the original text, by

the Clarendon Press, and has passed through many editions.

Some Characteristics of the Poem. The poem is of a character which is almost unique. It is written on no very definite plan, but describes a series of visions which the author is supposed to see in his dream. But the visions are often of startling reality, and of undying interest. At one moment, their value is almost wholly historical, and they show us the everyday life of the fourteenth century as it really was, and as it differed from modern times. At another moment, we are sharply reminded, as with the lash of a satirist's whip, that the same old abuses, such as shirking of honest work, oppression of the poor by unscrupulous men of property, backbiting and slander, slothfulness and drinking, cheating by tradesmen, cunning forms of bribery, shameless begging by men who pretend to be maimed, barefaced robbery by violence, the wearing of finery by females who cannot afford it, the spoiling of children by weak indulgence, the neglect by some preachers of their own advice, innumerable forms of trickery and falsehood, the sins of pride, luxury, envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, and sloth—with many other like frailties of human nature—are quite as common at the present day as they were when the dreamer

noted them. Everywhere the writer is severely honest, a lover of truth and a hater of shams, and enlists our sympathies even when, in a burst of unpractical enthusiasm, he advocates ideal reforms such as no man is ever likely to see. He abounds, moreover, in allegorical descriptions and personifications; for him, Holy-Church is a beautiful lady, and Meed (*i.e.* Bribery) a woman in gorgeous apparel; Reason and Conscience speak their minds, and give advice to the king; the fifth commandment is represented by a ford over a river, the tenth by a croft, and the ninth by a 'barrow' or burial-mound. Now and then we are reminded of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, especially when we come upon such names as Suffer-till-I-see-my-time or Warin Wisdom and his comrade Witty. That the Puritans were not the first to invent long names expressive of goodness is made manifest when Langland tells us of Tom-true-tongue-tell-me-no-foles-nor-lying-stories-to-laugh-at-for-I-loved-them-never. But the truth is that no mere description can convey much of the spirit of this remarkable work; it must be read, and read more than once, if it is to be at all understood. I will merely add here my conviction that much good may be learnt from it by any one who is of a docile temperament, and is not averse from instruction in truth. And it is proper to say

that, whilst the author is ever craving for the reforms of abuses, he frequently shows a conservative spirit in an unexpected manner.

Argument of the Poem. The portion of the Poem here printed contains two distinct visions or dreams. The former occupies the Prologue and Passus I—IV; the latter, Passus V—VII. The former may be called the Vision of the Field Full of Folk (Prologue); of Holy-Church (Pass. I); and of the Lady Meed (Pass. II—IV). The latter is the Vision of the Seven Deadly Sins (Pass. V 1—519); and of Piers the Plowman (Pass. V 520—end, Pass. VI and VII). Piers the Plowman is first mentioned in Pass. V 544.

Prologue; The Field Full of Folk. The author describes how, weary of wandering, he sits down to rest upon Malvern Hills, and there falls asleep and dreams. In his vision, the world and its people appear as The Field Full of Folk, busily engaged in their various vocations. The field was situate between the tower of Truth (who is God the Father) and the dungeon which is the abode of evil spirits. In it there were ploughmen and spendthrifts, anchorites, merchants, jesters, beggars, pilgrims, hermits, friars, a pardoner with his bulls, and priests who deserted their cures. There was also a king, to whom an angel speaks words of advice. Then was

seen suddenly a rout of rats and mice, conspiring to bell the cat, from doing which they were dissuaded by a wise mouse. There were also law-sergeants, burgesses, tradesmen, labourers, and taverners touting for custom.

Passus I. Presently, the dreamer sees a lovely lady, of whom he asks the meaning of the tower. She tells him it is the abode of the Creator, who provides men with the necessaries of life. The dungeon is the castle of Care, where lives the Father of Falseness. He prays the lady to disclose her name, and she tells him she is Holy-Church, and instructs him how great a treasure Truth is, how Lucifer fell through pride, that faith without works is dead, and that the way to heaven lies through Love.

Passus II. He asks how he may know Falsehood. She bids him turn, and see both Falsehood and Flattery. Looking aside, he sees, not them alone, but a woman in glorious apparel. He is told that she is the Lady Meed (i.e. Reward or Bribery), who is to be married to Falsehood on the morrow. Holy-Church then leaves him. The wedding is arranged, and Simony and Civil read a deed respecting the property with which Falsehood and Meed are to be endowed. Theology objects to the marriage, and disputes its legality; whereupon it is agreed that all must go to Westminster to have the question decided. All the parties ride off to London, Meed being

mounted upon a sheriff, and Falsehood upon a 'sisour,' or assize-man. Guile leads the way, and they soon reach the king's court, who vows that he will punish Falsehood if he can catch him. Whereupon all run away, except Meed alone, who is taken prisoner.

Passus III. Lady Meed is now brought before the king. The justices assure her that all will go well. To seem righteous, she confesses to a friar and is shriven, offering to glaze a church-window by way of amendment, immediately after which she advises mayors and judges to take bribes. The king proposes that she shall marry Conscience; but Conscience refuses, and exposes her faults. She attempts to retaliate and to justify herself; but Conscience refutes her arguments, quotes the example of Saul to shew the evil of covetousness, and declares that Reason shall one day reign upon earth and punish all wrong-doers. To this is appended a passage that may have been suggested by Edward's year of jubilee, and a caution about reading texts in connection with the context, neither of which things appears in the A-text.

Passus IV. Hereupon the king orders Reason to be sent for; who comes, accompanied by Wit and Wisdom. At this moment Peace enters, with a complaint against Wrong. Wrong, knowing the complaint to be true, wins over Wit and Wisdom to his side, by Meed's help, and

offers to buy Peace off with a present. Reason, however, is firm and will shew no pity, but advises the king to act with strict justice. The king is convinced, and prays Reason to remain with him for ever afterwards.

The Vision of the Seven Deadly Sins, and of Piers the Plowman.—Passus V. Here the dreamer awakes, but not for long; he soon falls to sleep over his prayers, and has a second dream, wherein he again sees the field full of folk, and Reason preaching to the assembled people, reminding them that the late tempest and pestilences were judgements of God. Many are affected by the sermon, and begin to repent and confess their sins. Of these, the first is Pride, who makes a vow of humility. The second is Luxury or Lechery, who vows henceforth only to drink water. The third is Envy, who confesses his evil thoughts and his attempts to harm his neighbours. The fourth is Wrath, a friar, whose aunt was a nun, and who was both cook and gardener to a convent, and incited many to quarrel. The fifth, Avarice, who confesses how he lied, cheated, and lent money upon usury, and who, not understanding the French word *restitution*, thought that it was another term for stealing. The sixth, Gluttony, who (on his way to church) is tempted into a London ale-house, of the interior of which the author gives a most life-like picture, as distinct as a

drawing by Hogarth. Gluttony also repents and vows amendment, but not till after he has first become completely drunk and afterwards felt ashamed of himself. The seventh is Sloth, a priest who knows rimes about Robin Hood better than his prayers, and can find a hare in a field more readily than he can read the lives of saints. Robert the robber too repents, and prays for forgiveness, and Repentance makes supplication for all the penitents. Then all set out to seek after Truth, but no one knows the way. Soon they meet with a palmer, who had sought the shrines of many saints, but never that of one named *Truth*. At this moment Piers the Plowman appears for the first time, declaring that he knows Truth well, and will tell them the way, which he then describes.

Passus VI. The pilgrims still ask for a guide, and Piers says he will lead them, when he has ploughed his half-acre. Meanwhile he gives good advice to ladies and to a knight. Before starting, he makes his will, and then sets all who come to him to hard work. Many shirk their work, but are reduced to subordination by the sharp treatment of Hunger. Next follow some curious and interesting passages concerning the diet of the poor, strikes for higher wages, and the discontents engendered by a brief prosperity.

Passus VII. At this time Truth (*i. e.* God the

Father) sends Piers a bull of pardon, especially intended for kings, knights, bishops, and the labouring poor, and even for some lawyers and merchants, in a less degree. A priest disputes the validity of Piers' pardon, and wants to see it. The dispute between him and Piers is so violent that the dreamer awakes, and the poem of Piers the Plowman (properly so called) ends with a peroration on the small value of the pope's pardons, and the superiority of a righteous life over mere trust in indulgences, at the Last Great Day.

The Visions of Do-well, Do-bet, and Do-best. The poem of *Do-well* ranges over too many subjects to admit of a brief analysis. It is here that occurs the curious prophecy, that a king would one day come and beat the religious orders for breaking their rules, and then would the abbot of Abingdon receive a knock from the king, and incurable would be the wound; a passage which excited great interest in the days of Henry VIII. The poem of *Do-bet* introduces Faith, personated by Abraham, and Hope; both of whom pass by the wounded man who has been stripped by thieves. But Love, the Good Samaritan, who is none other than Jesus in the dress of Piers the Plowman (*i. e.* incarnate), alone has compassion on him and saves his life. The poem next vividly describes the death of Christ, the struggle between Life and

Death and between Light and Darkness, the meeting together of Truth and Mercy, Righteousness and Peace, while the Saviour rests in the grave; the descent of Christ into hell and His victory over Satan and Lucifer.¹ But the poem of *Do-best* shows that the end is not yet. The Saviour ascends, and Antichrist comes down upon the earth. The Church is assailed by many foes; Death 'pushes' to the dust kings and knights, emperors and popes, and many a lovely lady. Envy hates Conscience, who, hard beset by Pride and Sloth, cries out to Contrition to help him; but Contrition slumbers, benumbed by deadly potions given by flattering friars. With a last effort Conscience arouses himself, determined to wander as a pilgrim over the earth till he shall find Piers the Plowman. And the dreamer awakes in tears.

The Metre of the Poem. The metre here adopted is a modern modification of the original alliterative metre, which was in itself a modification of the measure in which our oldest English poetry was written before the Conquest. I shall only note here the chief peculiarities of the metre as it appears in my own version.

If we employ the term *loud* syllables to denote such

¹ I have already given a partially modernised version of Passus XXI, which treats of Christ's death and descent into hell, in Ward's *English Poets*, vol. i. pp. 96-101.

syllables as are strongly accented, and *light* syllables to denote such as are accented but weakly or not at all, we find the chief rules to be these.

1. There is a slight metrical pause near the middle of every line, which is thus made to consist of separate half-lines.

2. Each half-line contains two or more *loud* syllables, two being the usual number. More than two sometimes appear in the former half-line, but rarely in the second.

3. The initial letter which is common to two or more of these loud syllables is called the *rime-letter*. Each line should have two *rime-letters* in the former half, and one in the second; (but occasionally this arrangement is reversed). The *rime-letters* in the former half-line are called the *sub-letters*; that in the latter, the *chief-letter*.

4. The *chief-letter* should begin the *former* of the two *loud* syllables in the second half-line. If the line contain only two rime-letters, it is (usually) because one of the sub-letters is dispensed with; it is rarely that the chief-letter is lacking.

5. If the chief-letter be a consonant, the sub-letters should be the same consonant, or a symbol expressing the same consonantal sound. If it be a vowel, the sub-letters should also be vowels (usually not the same vowel); Langland even alliterates vowels with *b*. If the chief-

letter be a combination of consonants, such as *sp* or *str*, the sub-letters frequently present the same combination, although the recurrence of the first letter only would suffice.

But it must be added that Langland is extremely careless of exact rules. He even introduces *two* different pairs of rime-letters in the same line, and at times actually allows rime-letters to commence light syllables. In some lines it is difficult to detect any alliteration at all. If the reader fails to see any alliteration in some of the lines in this modern version, it is usually because the metre of the original is equally careless.

I append some examples, marking the *loud* syllables by an accent, and the *rime-letters* by italics. It will be observed that the *last* loud syllable in a line is seldom either the last syllable in the line or the last but one. I mark the medial pause by a slight space.

The normal form is as follows :—

I was <i>wéary</i> of <i>wá</i> nd'ring and <i>wént</i> me to rést ;	7
I <i>slú</i> mbered and slépt, they <i>só</i> unded so mérry.	10

The following are varieties :—

A <i>déep</i> <i>dá</i> le benéath, and a <i>dú</i> ngeon thereín ;	15
A <i>fáir</i> fiéld <i>fú</i> ll of <i>fó</i> lk I <i>fó</i> und there betwéen ;	17
They <i>wént</i> on their <i>wá</i> y with mány <i>wí</i> se táles ;	48
Of <i>fá</i> lsehood in <i>fá</i> sting of <i>vó</i> w ^s they had bróken ;	71

(Here *f* is alliterated with *v*.)

In trúst of *fóur* v́irtues the bést of all v́irtues ; 103
The *mí*ght of the cómmons had *máde* him to reígn ; 113

(Here there are but two rime-letters.)

And to the *róut* of *ráts* *rehéarsèd* these wórdz ; 184

(The third *r* begins a light syllable.)

The above examples may suffice, though they do not include all possible variations. As a rule, the lines have a certain swing of their own, and it is unadvisable to analyse them closely. It may be remarked here that the *w* was sounded before *r* in such words as *wrong* and *wrought*, so that these words alliterated with words having an initial *w* ; and similarly *k* was sounded before *n* in such words as *knight* and *kneel*.

The present version. In the present version, I attempt to reproduce the general impression which the old poem would make upon one who is familiar with the old language, whilst at the same time I avoid, except in a very few instances, all obsolete words and phrases. In such cases, as in the occurrence of *provisor*, the meaning of the word is duly explained in the Notes ; where I also explain all the more important allusions to the history or manners of the fourteenth century. The version agrees with the original line for line, and in many lines it reproduces it word for word. The metre in general has

its own lilt, and may be left to take care of itself. Some account of it has just been given in the preceding paragraph. The lines are numbered as in the original; a very few have been occasionally omitted, as the numbering shows. I believe it will be found that, even in the poverty of its modern dress, the poem is of considerable interest as a historical document, as a comment on the times, and perhaps, to some extent, as a literary work.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

* * In this table the numbers within marks of parenthesis, as (iii. 126), refer to the Passus and line of the B-text of the poem in which the events mentioned are referred to. Passus viii—xx are not included in the present version.

Edward II. deposed (iii. 126)	.	.	Jan. 20, 1327.
Edward III. begins to reign	.	.	Jan. 25, 1327.
Edward II. murdered (iii. 126)	.	.	Sept. 21, 1327.
Langland born	.	.	about 1332.
Chaucer born	.	.	about 1340.
Coinage of nobles (iii. 45)	.	.	1343 or 1344.
Battle of Créçy (xii. 107)	.	.	Aug. 26, 1346.
First great pestilence (v. 13)	May 31, 1348,	to	Sept. 29, 1349.
Treaty of Brétigny (iii. 188)	.	.	May 8, 1360.
Second great pestilence (v. 13)	Aug. 15, 1361,	to	May 3, 1362.
Great storm of wind (v. 14)	.	.	Saturday, Jan. 15, 1362.
A-text of Piers the Plowman written	.	.	. 1362.
Third great pestilence (v. 13)	.	.	July 2 to Sept. 29, 1369.

Chichester lord mayor (xiii. 271)	Oct. 1369 to Oct. 1370.
A fourth pestilence (xiii. 248)	1375 and 1376.
Death of the Black Prince	June 8, 1376.
Jubilee of Edward's accession (iii. 297?)	Feb. 1377.
B-text of Piers the Plowman written	early in 1377.
Death of Edward III.	June 21, 1377.
Schism of the Popes	Sept. 21, 1378.
Wycliffe's translation of the Bible (viii. 90)	before 1380.
Wat Tyler's rebellion	June 1381.
Chaucer writes his Canterbury Tales	about 1386-7.
Gower's <i>Confessio Amantis</i> first completed	1390.
C-text of Piers the Plowman written	about 1392-3.
Richard II. taken prisoner	Aug. 18, 1399.
Poem of Richard the Redeless	Sept. 1399.
Richard II. formally deposed	Sept. 30, 1399.
Death of Chaucer	Oct. 25, 1400.
Probable date of the death of Langland	about 1400

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THE VISION OF
PIERS THE PLOWMAN

PROLOGUE.

THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK.

IN a summer season, when soft was the sun,
I enshrouded me well in a shepherd's garb,
And robed as a hermit, unholy of works,
Went wide through the world, all wonders to hear.
And on a May morning, on Malvern hills, 5
Strange fancies befel me, and fairy-like dreams.
I was weary of wand'ring, and went to repose
On a broad green bank, by a burn-side ;
As I lay there and leaned and looked on the waters,
I slumbered and slept, they sounded so merry. 10

Came moving before me a marvellous vision ;
I was lost in a wild waste ; but *where*, I discerned not.

I beheld in the east, on high, near the sun,
A tower on a hill-top, with turrets well wrought ;
A deep dale beneath, and a dungeon therein, 15
With deep ditches and dark, and dreadful to see.
A fair field, full of folk, I found there between,
Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich,
All working or wand'ring, as the world requires.

Some ploughed with the plough; their play was but seldom ;
Some sowing, some earning, with sweat of their brows, 21
The gain which the great ones in gluttony waste.

In pride of apparel some passed on their way,
And in costliest clothing were quaintly disguised.
In prayer and in penance some placed their delight, 25
And all for our Lord's love lived strictly and hard,
In hope to have after their heavenly meed ;
These hermits and anchorites held to their cells,
Not caring to roam through the country around
For doles of sweet dainties, their flesh to delight. 30

Some chose to be chapmen, to chaffer for gain ;
As it seems to our sight, such surely succeed.
And some, to make merry, as minstrels are wont,
Getting gold with their glee, yet guiltless, I trust.
As for jugglers and jesters, all Judas's children, 35

That feign silly fancies, apparelled as fools,
Having wit, if they willed it, to work as they ought—
I pass o'er what Paul would have preached of these sinners ;
For the speaker of evil is Satan's own son.

Next beggars and beadsmen were bustling about, 40
Their bags and their bellies with bread were well cramm'd.
By falsehood they fed them, and fought o'er their ale,
As greedy as gluttons they go to their beds,
And rise up as ribalds, these robberlike knaves ;
Sleep and vile sloth pursue them for ever. 45

Next, pilgrims and palmers would plight them together
To seek out Saint James and saints known in Rome ;
They went on their way with many wise tales,
And had leave to tell lies all their lifetime after.
Some saw I that said they had sought out the saints ; 50
In each tale that they told their tongue fashion'd lies
Much sooner than sooth, as it seemed by their speech.

Of hermits a huge heap, with hooks to their staves,
To Walsingham went ; and their wenches went after ;
Great lubbers and long, that to labour were loath ; 55
They clothed them in cloaks, to be known from all others
And arrayed them as hermits, more ease to enjoy.

I found there some friars of all the four orders,

Who preached to the people for personal profit ;
As it seemed to them good, put a gloss on the gospel, 60
And explained it at pleasure ; they coveted copes.
Many of these masters may wear what they will ;
Their money and merchandise meet well together ;
Since Charity was chapman, and chief to shrieve lords,
What sights we have seen in a few short years ! 65
Unless they and the Church keep closer together,
The most mischief e'er made will be mounting up fast.

There preached, too, a pardoner, a priest, as he seemed,
Who brought forth a bull, with the bishop's seals,
And said he himself might absolve them all 70
Of falsehood in fasting, or vows they had broken.
The laymen believed him, and lik'd well his words,
Came up and came kneeling, to kiss the said bull ;
He blessed them right bravely, and blinded their eyes,
And won with his roll both their rings and their brooches. 75
Thus they give up their gold for such gluttons to spend,
And lose to loose livers their lawful gains.
If the bishop were wiser, or worth both his ears,
His seal ne'er were sent, to deceive so the people.
Small blame of the bishop such boys will express ; 80
For the parish-priest and pardoner part all the silver
That the poor of the parish would otherwise share.

The parsons and parish-priests complained to the bishop
That their parishes were poor since the pestilence-year,
Asking licence and leave in London to dwell, 85
To sing there for simony ; for silver is sweet.

Bishops and bachelors, both masters and doctors,
Having cures under Christ, and crowned with the tonsure
To show they should hear their parishioners' shrift,
Preaching and praying, and feeding the poor, 90
Are lodged now in London, in Lent-time and ever.
Some serve there the king, and count out his silver,
In chancery and exchequer make claims of his dues
From wards and from ward-motes, his waifs and his strays.
And some serve as servants both ladies and lords, 95
Are as stewards enstalled, or as judges take seat.
Their masses and matins and many of their prayers
Are done undevoutly. I dread, at the last,
Lest Christ, at the judgement, will curse not a few.
I pondered on the power that Peter had to keep— 100
'To bind and to unbind'—as the Book tells us.
How he left it, with love, as our Lord him bade,
In trust of four virtues—the best of all virtues—
As 'cardinal' known, or 'the closing of gates,'
Where Christ's in His kingdom, to close and to shut, 105
Or to open to good men the glory of heaven.

But for 'cardinals' at court, who have caught up the name,
And presume on their power a pope to appoint,
To have Peter's own power—impugn it I dare not ;
To learning and love that election belongeth ; 110
I might, but I must not, say more of that court.

Then came there a king, with knights in a troop ;
The might of the commons had made him to reign ;
And then came Kind-Wit, and clerks he appointed
To counsel the king, and the commons to save. 115
The king and his knights, and the clergy also
Decreed that the commons must toil for their bread.

The commons contrived for the craftsmen their trades,
And for profit o' the people set ploughmen to work,
To till and to travail, as true life requires ; 120
While the king and the commons, with Kind-Wit as third,
Made laws for protecting all loyal men's goods.

Then looked up a lunatic, a lean man withal,
Knelt down to the king, and full clerk-like spake :—
" Christ keep thee, sir king ! and thy kingdom eke, 125
So to reign in thy land that thy lieges may love thee,
And thy righteous rule be rewarded in heaven ! "

Then, high in the air, an angel from heaven

Spake loudly in Latin, that laymen might fail
To object or to judge, or justly to doubt, 130
But suffer and serve:—and thus said the angel—
“ Know, prince, that thy power soon passes for ever ;
Thy kingdom is Christ’s, and in keeping His laws
Thou ’rt just ; but let justice be joined to discretion !
Array naked justice in raiment of mercy ; 135
Sow wisely such grain as thou gladly wouldst reap.
Who deals in bare justice, bare justice be dealt him ;
To him who has mercy shall mercy be meted.”

A riotous rich one, who rambled in talk,
To the angel on high made answer in anger :— 140
“ Since *rex* is derived, sure, from *rego*, I rule,
Kings rule by the laws, or they rule but in name.”

Then cried out the commons, exclaiming in Latin,
To the king and his knights (let him construe, who will) —
Precepta regis sunt nobis vincula legis:
“ Commandments of kings are the canons of law.” 145

Then forth ran a rout of great rats, all at once,
Where met them small mice, yea, more than a thousand ;
All came to a council for their common profit.
For a cat of the court would come, when he liked,
And chase them and clutch them, and catch them at will, 150

Play with them perilously, and push them about :—
“ For dread of the danger, look round us we dare not ;
If we grudge him his game, he will grieve us the more,
Tease us or toss us, or take in his claws,
That we loathe our own lives, ere he lets us go free. 155
If by wit or by wile we his will might withstand,
We might lord it aloft, and might live at our ease.”

Then a rat of renown, very ready of tongue,
Said, for a sovereign help to themselves,
“ Some cits have I seen, in the city of London, 160
Wear chains on their necks of the choicest gold,
Or collars of crafty work ; uncoupled they go
Both in warren and waste, as their will inclines,
And elsewhere at odd times, as I hear tell.
If they bore each a hell, by its ringing, me thinketh, 165
One might wit where they were, and away soon run !
Right so,” quoth the rat, “ doth reason suggest
To buy a bell of brass or of bright silver,
To be bound on a collar, for our common profit,
On the cat’s neck to hang ; then each hearer can tell 170
If he rambles or rests him, or runs out to play !
When mild is his mood, we can move as we list
And appear in his presence, when playful and pleased,
Or, when angry, beware ; and away will we run ! ”

All the rout of great rats to his reasons assented, 175
But when bought was the bell, and well bound on the collar,
Not a rat in the rout, for the realm of all France,
Durst bind the said bell about the cat's neck,
Nor hang it beside him, all England to win !
They owned they were cowards, and their counsel weak ; 180
So their labour was lost, and all their long study.

Then a mouse of mind, who had merit, methought,
Strode forth sternly, and stood before them all,
And to the rout of rats rehearsed these words :
‘ Though we killed the old cat, yet another would come 185
To catch all our kin, though we crept under benches.
I counsel the commons to let the cat be ;
Be we never so bold as to show him the bell.
For I heard my sire say, some seven years since,
‘ Where the cat is a kitten, the court is a sad one ; ’ 190
So witnesseth scripture, who willeth may read it,
Woe to thee, land, when thy king is a child ! (Eccl. x. 16).
For no one could rest him, for rats in the night !
While the cat catches rabbits, he covets us less,
But is fed as with venison ; defame we him never !
Better a little loss than a livelong sorrow, 195
By loss of a loathed one to live in disorder !
For many men's malt we mice would destroy,

And ye, rout of rats, would rend men's clothes,
If the cat of the court could not catch you at will!
Ye rats, if unrul'd, could not rule o'er yourselves. 200
I see," quoth the mouse, "such a mischief might follow,
Neither kitten nor cat, by my counsel, shall suffer;
Nor care I for collars that have cost me nothing;
Had they cost me a crown, I would keep it unknown,
And suffer our rulers to rove where they like, 205
Uncoupled, or coupled, to catch what they can.
I warn well each wise man to ward well his own."
What this vision may mean, ye men that are merry,
Discern ye! I dare not discern it myself!

I saw then a hundred, in hoods all of silk, 210
All serjeants, it seemed, that served at the bar,
Pleading their causes for pence or for pounds,
But for love of our Lord their lips moved never!
Sooner measure the mist upon Malvern hills
Than see a mouth mumble ere money be shown! 215

Barons and burgesses, and bondmen also
I saw in this assembly, as soon ye shall hear;
Bakers and brewers, and butchers full many,
Websters of woollen, and weavers of linen,
Tailors and tinkers, and tollers in markets, 220

Masons and miners, and many other crafts.
Of labourers of all kinds there leapt forth some,
Such as dikers and delvers ; ill done was their work ;
They drawled through the day, singing “ *Dieu vous save,
dame Emme !* ”

Cooks and kitchen-lads cried—“ Hot pies, hot ! ”—225
“ Good geese and good bacon ! ”—“ Good dinners ! come,
dine ! ”

Taverners touted—“ A taste here, for nothing ! ”
“ White wine of Alsace ! ”—“ Red Gascony wine ! ”
“ Here’s Rhine wine ! ” “ Rochelle wine, your roast to
digest ! ”
All this saw I sleeping, and seven times more. 230

END OF PROLOGUE.

PASSUS I.

THE VISION OF HOLY-CHURCH.

WHAT the mountain may mean, and the murky dale,
And the fair field full of folk, I shall fairly show.
A lady, lovely of look, and in linen clothed,
Came down from the castle, and called me by name,
And said, "Son, sleepest thou? seest thou this people, 5
How busy they be, all about this maze?
The chief part of this people, that pass o'er the earth,
Want worship in *this* world, and wish for no more,
They hold no account of a heaven, save here!"

I had fear of her face, though her aspect was fair, 10
And said—"Mercy! my lady! what mean you by this?"
"That tower on the hill-top is Truth's own abode,

And I would that ye wrought as His word teacheth.
 He is Father of your faith, and formèd you all,
 Both figure and face, and He gave you five wits 15
 To worship Him with, all the while ye are here.
 He hath ordered the earth, for your help, to supply
 Both woollen and linen, and livelihood's needs
 In measurable manner, to make you at ease ; 19
 And commanded, of His courtesy, in common three things ;
 None others are needful, now list to their names,
 I reckon then by reason ! rehearse thou them after.
 The first one is clothing, to keep thee from cold ;
 Next, meat at thy meals, best medicine for ill ;
 Last, drink when thou'rt dry, but desist from excess, 25
 Lest thy work be the worse, when worktime has come. . . .
 Dread drink that delights thee, thy deeds shall be better,
 Moderation is medicine, though much thou desire. 35
 All suits not the soul, that the appetite seeketh,
 Nor booteth the body, that's best for the soul.
 Ne'er trust to thy body, a traitor misleads it,
 This world with its wiles lies in wait to betray.
 For the fiend and thy flesh ever follow together, 40
 Pursuing thy soul, and seducing thine heart ;
 Be wise then and wary, I warn thee full well."

“ Gramercy, my lady, I mind well thy words ;

But the wealth of this world, so much wooed by mankind,
 To whom doth that treasure, pray tell me, belong ? ” 45
 “ See the gospel,” quoth she, “ where God said Himself,
 When the people would pose Him with a pennyi’ th’ temple,
 To tell if a tax should be tendered to Cæsar ;
 He asked of them all, of whom spake the letters,
 And whose was the image engraven thereon ? 50
 ‘ ’Tis Cæsar’s,’ they said, ‘ we can see it each one.’
 ‘ Give Cæsar,’ quoth God, ‘ what to Cæsar belongeth,
 And to God, what is God’s, if to good ye incline.’
 For Reason and Right should be rulers of all ;
 Good Sense should be warden your wealth to preserve, 55
 Safe guarding your goods, for your gain when in need ;
 For caution and care are the causes of thrift.”

Then I meekly besought, for her Maker’s sake—
 “ The dungeon in the dale, so dreadful to see,
 What meaneth its menace, my lady, I pray ? ” 60

“ ’Tis the Castle of Care ; whoso cometh therein
 May mourn that he born was, in body or soul.
 There watcheth a wight, and Wrong is his name,
 The father of falsehood, and finder of ill.
 Adam and Eve he to evil incited, 65
 Gave counsel to Cain, how to kill his brother,

And Judas beguiled with the Jews' silver,
Who hung himself after, on branch of an elder.
He letteth all love, and he lies to all those
That trust in his treasure, whom soon he betrays." 70

Then I wondred in my wit, who this woman might be
Who such words of wisdom from holy writ drew ;
I asked her, in the High name, ere ever she went,
To say who she was, who had warned me so well. 74

“Holy-Church,” quoth she, “as thou oughtest to know ;
I received thee at first, thy faith I thee taught ;
Thou broughtest me sureties, to be at my bidding,
And leally to love me, while life should endure.”

Then I knelt on my knees, and her mercy besought,
And piteously prayed her to pray for my sins, 80
And kindly instruct me on Christ to believe,
And to work at His will, who had wrought me as man.
“Ne'er tell me of treasure, but tell me the truth,
How to save my soul ; as a saint I revere thee !”

“When all treasures are tried, know, Truth is the best,
'God is Love,' saith the text, and it teaches you all 86
That Truth can be trusted, like true God Himself.
Who is true of his tongue, and has no false tales,

Is wary in works, and wishes no evil,
Is a god, saith the gospel, on ground and aloft, 90
Yea, like to our Lord, by saint Luke's own words.
The teachers who trow this should teach it to all,
For Christian and heathen lay claim to the Truth.

Both kings and their knights should keep to the Truth,
They should ride through the realm, and arrest the false, 95
Should take the transgressors, and tie them in bonds,
Till Truth should determine their trespass's fine.
To deal with such dooms is the duty of knights,
Not to fast for one Friday in five-score years! 99
Let them ward men and women that work for the Truth,
Nor falsely forsake them for favour or bribes.

For David, in his day, dubbed knights for his service,
Who swore on their swords to serve Truth for ever,
And he that was perjured apostate was deemed. 104

But Christ, King of kings, made ten orders of knighthood,
Cherubs and seraphs, seven more, and one other,
Majestic and mighty, the more was their bliss ;
Over armies of angels archangels were these,
Of the Trinity taught all the truth to revere,
Obeying God's bidding ; He bade them naught else. 110

Lucifer with his legions had learnt it in heaven,
But brake his obedience, abandoned his bliss,
And fell from that fellowship, in a fiend's likeness,
To a deep dark hell, to dwell there for ever ;
And with him more thousands than man could number 115
Leapt out with Lucifer, in loathly forms,
Believing in him who in this wise lied :—

*I will sit also in the sides of the north ; I will be like the
most High (Isa. xiv. 13).*

They that hoped in his boasting, no heaven could hold them,
Nine days were they falling, in likeness of fiends,
Till God, of His goodness, to stay them began, 120
Closed up the skies, and commanded a rest.

The fall of the wicked was wondrous and strange,
Some in air, some on earth, some in hell's abyss ;
But Lucifer, lowest he lieth of all ;
For pride that he put forth, his pain hath no end ; 125
And all wicked workers shall likewise wend,
After their deathday, to dwell with that fiend ;
But well-doing workers, as holy writ tells,
Who end, as I ere said, in truth and in peace,
May be sure that their souls shall ascend unto heaven 130
Where Truth, the Tri-une, shall enthrone them on high.
So I say, as I said ere, at sight of these texts,

When all treasures are tried, sure, Truth is the best.
Let laymen then learn, for learned men know it,
That Truth is the choicest of treasures on earth." 135

"I perceive not," I said, "till you show me yet more,
By what means in my mind it commenceth to grow."

"Thou dotest, thou dullard ! how dull are thy wits !
Too little of Latin thou'st learnt in thy youth !—

'Alas ! how barren were my youthful days !'—

'Tis a knowledge," quoth she, "in thy nature implanted, 140
To love thy liege Lord no less than thyself,

Nor do deadly sin, though death should assail thee ;

This, I trow, is the Truth ; who can teach thee better,

Suffer him to say, and pursue what he teaches ;

Thus witnesseth the word ; then work thou thereafter. 145

Remember that Love is the medicine of heaven,

To be filled with its fulness gives freedom from sin.

God wrought all His works by Love, as He listed,

And taught it to Moses, as most like to heaven ;

'Tis a plant giving peace, the most precious of virtues. 150

Not heaven could withhold it, so heavy it seemed,

Till it had, on this earth, well eaten its fill ;

But when flesh and blood in the world it had taken,

No leaf on a linden was lighter thereafter ;

As piercing and sharp as the point of a needle, 155
No armour might stay it, and no high walls.

'Tis Love, then, that leadeth the Lord's host in heaven ;
As the mayor is a mean 'twixt the king and the commons,
So Love is a leader and shapeth the laws ;
On man, for his misdeeds, he fixes the fine. 160
To say thee its nature, its source is in might ;
In the heart is its head and its holy spring.

In conscience of heart its cause hath its rise,
As found in the Father, who formèd us all,
Looked on us with love, and let His Son die 165
Meekly for our misdeeds, to amend us all.
Yet He wished them no woe, who had wrought Him that pain,
But meekly with His mouth for mercy He prayed,
For pity of the people that pained Him to death.

Of shining examples Himself was the chief ; 170
He was mighty, yet meek, and His mercy He granted
To those that high hanged Him, and piercèd His heart.

I counsel you rich ones, have ruth on the poor,
Though mighty in meetings, be meek in your works ;
The measure ye mete with, amiss or aright, 175
Shall measure your deeds when ye migrate hence.

*With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you
again (Matt. vii. 2).*

Though true of your tongue, and true in your dealings,
And as chaste as a child that in church first weeps,
Unless ye love leally, and lend to the poor,
And such goods as God sends you, in goodness impart, 180
Ye have no more merit in mass or in prayers
Than Moll of her maidenhood, whom no man desires.

For James the gentle thus judged in his book,
That Faith without fact has nothing of worth,
'Tis as dead as a doornail, save deeds shall follow ! 185
Faith without works is dead also (James ii. 26).
Chastity without charity shall chained be in hell ;
'Tis as lorn as a lamp, whose light is extinct.

Many chaplains are chaste, but their charity's naught ;
Promote them, they prove to be greedy and grasping,
Unkind to their kin, and to Christian souls, 190
They chew up their charity, and chide to have more !
Such chastity without charity shall chained be in hell !
Many curates in charge are chaste in their ways,
Yet covetous cravings encumber them ever,
So hardly hath avarice hasped them in bonds ; 195
Their truth has been turned into treachery of hell,
And incites the unlearned to cease to give alms.

Then weigh well the words that God's word utters,

Give of your goods, and to you shall be given, (Luke vi. 38);
'Tis the lockgate of love, that letteth out grace 200
To comfort the careworn encumbered with sin.

Love, next our Lord, is the leech of man's life,
The right road that runneth directly to heaven.
So I say of the texts, as I said before,
When all treasures are tried, then Truth is the best. 205
I have told thee what Truth is; no treasure is better;
I may linger no longer; the Lord be thy guide!"

PASSUS II.

MEED AND FALSEHOOD.

YET I knelt on my knees, loud crying for grace,
Saying, "Mercy, my lady, for our Lady's sake,
Who bare Him that bought us on the blessed rood,
Teach me some token, the False One to tell!"

"Look on thy left hand, and lo! where he standeth, 5
See False there and Flattery, and most of their fellows!"

Then I looked on my left, as the lady had said,
And was ware of a woman, most worthily clothèd,
All furnished with furs, none finer on earth,
Crowned with a crown, the king hath no better. 10
Featly her fingers were furnished with rings

Whereon were red rubies, as red as a coal,
Diamonds full dear, and double-rich sapphires,
Most precious of gems, that could poison destroy.

Her robe was full rich, of red scarlet in grain, 15
With ribands of red gold and richest of stones ;
Her ravishing raiment, her riches amazed me ;
I wondered what she was, whose wife she might be.

“ Who is this woman so worthily drest ? ”
“ ’Tis Meed the maid, who hath injured me oft, 20
Who hath Loyalty slandered, my lief one and dear,
And lied to all lords who have laws to observe.
In the palace of the pope she’s as prime as myself,
Though justice would ban her, for her bastard birth.

Falsehood was her father, full fickle of tongue, 25
Who never said sooth since he settled on earth,
And Meed has his manners, his natural match ;
*Like father, like daughter ; a good tree bringeth forth good
fruit (Matt. vii. 17).*

My place is above her ; my birth is the better.
Great God is my father, the ground of all graces,
Who ne’er had beginning, and I his good daughter. 30
Mercy He gave me, for my marriage-portion ;

The man that has mercy, and loyally loves me,
Shall be my lief lord, in the heaven on high.

The man that takes Meed—my head dare I wager—
Shall lose, for her love, all the love of our Lord. 35

What David the king saith of men that take meed,
And of merciful men that maintain the truth,
And how souls shall be saved, the Psalter has told us :—
Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? (Ps. xv. 1).

Now Meed will be married to a miscreant base,
To one False Fickle-Tongue, child of a fiend ; 40
Flattery, by fair spech, this folk hath enchanted,
And Liar hath led her in this wise to wed.

To-morrow shall be made the maiden's bridal,
Thou may'st wit, if thou wilt, of what order are they
That belong to that lordship, the greater and less. 45
Ken what thou canst, yet keep well thy tongue,
Nor brand them with blame, until Loyalty judge
Who has power to punish ; then put forth thy plea.

I commend thee to Christ, and His virgin Mother ;
And ne'er be thy conscience encumbered with meed!" 50

The lady then left me, still lying asleep ;
 And how Meed was then married I marked in my dream ;
 How all the rich retinue, that reigned with Sir False,
 Were bidden to the bridal, in both of their trains,
 Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich. 55
 To marry this maiden were many assembled
 Of knights and of clerks, with the commons and others,
 Assize-men and sumners, and sheriffs and clerks,
 Beadles and bailiffs, and brokers of wares,
 Purveyors, and advocates of the Court of Arches ; 60
 None can reckon the rout that thus ran after Meed.

But Simony and Civil-law and assize-men of courts
 Knew most about Meed of any men, methought.
 Flattery was the first that her fetched from her bower, 64
 And, as broker, had brought her to mate with Sir False.
 When Simony and Civil-law had seen what they wished,
 They assented, for silver, to say what they would.
 Then Liar leapt forth, saying, "Lo ! here ! a charter
 That Guile, with his great oaths, hath given them both ;"
 And prayed Civil-law to see it, and Simony to read it. 70
 Then Simony and Civil-law stood forth both,
 Unfolding th' enfeoffment that False then had made,
 And thus 'gan these rascals to read to the rabble :—

Know all men by these presents, &c.

“Wit ye and witness ye, who wander on earth,
That Meed here is married much more for her goods 75
Than for virtue or fairness, or freedom by birth.
For sake of her riches, Sir False is so fond,
And Flattery, with fickle speech, enfeoffs them by charter
To be princes in pride, and the poor to despise,
To backbite and boast, and bear false witness, 80
To scorn and to scold, and slanders to utter,
To be braggart, and boldly to break the commandments.

I grant them the earldoms of Envy and Wrath,
With the castles of Chiding and Chattering-out-of-reason,
The county of Coveting, and coasts all around, 85
Such as Usury and Avarice, I grant them all these,
With bargains and brokerage, and the borough of Theft,
The lordship of Lechery in length and in breadth,
As in works and in words, and watchings of eyes,
With wishes full wanton, and idle thoughts, 90
When wild is the will, but occasion wanteth.

Eke Gluttony he gives them, and granteth them oaths,
And all day to drink at divers taverns,
Still gibing and jesting, and judging their fellows,
And feasting on fasting-days, ere full time has come, 95

Ever sitting and supping, till sleep them assaileth,
In luxury lolling on lazy beds,
Till Sloth and sleep make sleeker their sides ;—
To awake in despair, without will to amend,
And believe they are lost, for their last end has come ! 100

They shall have and hold, and their heirs ever after,
A dwelling with the devil, and be damnèd for ever,
With th' appurtenances of purgatory, in the pain of hell ;
Yielding for this thing, at one year's end,
Their souls unto Satan, to suffer like pains 105
With the wicked in woe, while God is in heaven ! ”
In witness of which thing Wrong was the first,
And Piers the pardoner of the Pauline order,
Bat, the beadle of Buckingham-shire,
Reynold, the reeve of Rutland-soken, 110
Mund the Miller, and many more others.—
“ In the date of the devil this deed I enseal
In sight of Sir Simony, by Civil-law's leave ! ”

Theology chafed, when this charter he heard,
And to Civil-law said, “ now sorrow be thine, 115
Such a wedding to work, to war against Truth ;
Ere this wedding be wrought, may woe thee betide !

For Meed is a maid, of Amends engendered,
God granteth to give to a true man Meed ;
A beguiler has gained her ! now God give thee sorrow ! 120
The text never taught so, for Truth knows the sooth—
' Worthy is the workman, his hire to have ! '
Thou hast forced her on False ; now fie on thy law !
By lying thou livest, and lecherous works,
Simony and thyself bring shame on the Church. 125
The notaries and ye annoy all the people ;
Ye both shall abide it, by Him that me made !
Well wit ye, deceivers, except your wits fail,
That False is but faithless, and fickle of works,
And born as a bastard of Beelzebub's kin ; 130
But Meed is a maiden, a mistress of worth,
Who might kiss e'en the king, in a cousinly wise.

Then work ye by wisdom and by wit also,
And lead her to London, where law is declared,
If law will allow of their living together. 135
Though the justice gives judgement to join her with False,
Beware lest ye wed her, for Truth is full wise,
And Conscience of His council, who kens you each one ;
If He finds you in fault, and to False thus allied,
'Twill sit on your souls very sorely at last ! ' 140

Then Civil-law assented, but Simony would not
Till he and his scribes for their service had silver.

Then Flattery fetched forth florins unnumbered,
Bidding Guile to go giving much gold all about,
Notably to notaries, none should be missed, 145
And to fee False-witness with florins at will ;
“ He’ll be master of Meed, and will make her assent ! ”

When given was the gold, full great was the thanking
Of False and of Flattery, for their fair gifts ;
Soon came they to comfort from care Sir False, 150
And said, “ Sir, for certain, now cease will we never,
Till Meed be thy wife, through the wits of us all.
We have mastered Meed with our merry speech ;
She has granted to go, with a right good will,
To London, to know if the law will allow 155
The judges to join you in joy everlasting.”
Then fain was Sir False, and Flattery blithe ;
And summoned all sage men from shires around,
And bade them be bound, both beggars and others,
To wend soon to Westminster, to witness this deed. 160

They hunted for horses, to hasten the journey,
And Flattery fetched forth some foals of the best.

Meed sat on a sheriff, new shod for the nonce,
False rode an assize-man, that softly trotted,
And Flattery a flatterer, finely attired. 165

Then had notaries none, annoyed were they all
That Civil-law and Simony should follow on foot ;
But Simony swore, and Civil-law also,
That sumners should be saddled, to serve them at need,
And provisors apparelled as palfreys also ; 170
Sir Simony himself was to sit on their backs.

“ Ye deans and ye subdeans, now draw you together,
Archdeacons, officials, and registrars all,
Be saddled with silver, our sins to allow,
Adultery, divorces, and doubling of debts, 175
And payments for bishops that visit abroad.
The Paulines' people, for plaints in consistory,
Shall serve here myself, who am Civil-law named.
Cart-saddle the commissary, our cart shall he draw,
And lewd men shall fee us for lewdnesses winked at. 180
Give Liar a long cart, to lead all the others,
Such as friars and false men, that run all afoot.”

Thus False and Sir Flattery fared on their way,
With Meed in the midst, and all these men after.

Time fails me to tell of the tail that did follow, 185
All manner of men that on earth's mould live ;
But Guile was foregoer, and guided them all.

Soothness perceived them, and said but a little,
But pricked well his palfrey, and passed all the rout,
And came to the king's court, and told it to Conscience, 190
And Conscience to the king recounted it after.

“ Now by Christ,” quoth the king, “ if I could but catch
False or Sir Flattery, or any of their fellows,
I'd wreak me on those wretches, that wrought have so ill,
And hang in a halter each hound that abets them ! 195
Not a bairn or a brother should bail out the least,
But the sentence of law should be served upon all ! ”

He commanded a constable, that came at his call,
“ Go, attach me those tyrants, I tell thee for sooth,
And fast fetter False, never free him for bribes ; 200
Let Guile be beheaded, nor go a foot further.
If you light upon Liar, ne'er let him escape,
But put him in the pillory, in spite of his prayers ;
And bring Meed to me, in spite of them all.”

Dread stood at the door, and this doom heard, 205
How the king had commanded constables and sergeants

To fetter Sir False, and to bind all his fellows.
Then went Dread away, and gave warning to False,
Bade him flee for fear, and his fellows go with him.

Then False in his fear fled fast to the friars; 210
And Guile too was going, aghast for his life,
But met with some merchants, who made him abide,
Shut him in their shops, to show forth their ware,
And apparelled him as a 'prentice, the people to serve.

Then lightly did Liar go leaping away, 215
Lurking through lanes, and belaboured by many;
He was nowhere welcome for his wily tales,
But everywhere hooted, and hustled to flee,
Till pardoners had pity, and pulled him indoors,
Washed him and wiped him, and wound him in raiment,
And sent him with seals on Sundays to churches, 221
Giving pardons for pence, by pounds at a time.
Then leeches had envy, and letters they sent him
To dress as a doctor, and dwell with them ever.

The grocers besought him to sell men their spices, 225
And tout for their trade; their terms well he knew.
But minstrels and messengers met with him once,
And withheld him a half-year, and eleven days.

Friars with fair speech fetched him at last,
And coped him as a friar, lest comers should know him ; 230
He has leave to go loose, as oft as he liketh,
And hie when he will to their house as his home.

All fled they for fear, and had flown into holes ;
Save Meed the maid, not a man durst abide ;
But, truly to tell it, she trembled for dread, 235
And lamented and wept when at last she was caught.

PASSUS III.

MEED AND CONSCIENCE.

NOW is Meed the maid, and no more of them all,
With beadles and bailiffs, soon brought to the king.
The king called a clerk—I ken not his name—
To take Meed the maid, and make her at ease.
“I shall try her myself, and truly enquire 5
What spouse in this world she would soonest wed.
If she works by my wish, and my will doth follow,
I forgive her this guilt; so God be my help!”

Courteously the clerk, as the king had commanded,
Took Meed by the middle, and set her i' the midst; 10
There was mirth and minstrelsy, Meed to amuse.

They that waited in Westminster worshipped her all.
Gently, with joy, all the justices hastened,

All bound for the bower where the bride dwelt,
To comfort her kindly, with Clergy's leave, 15
Saying, "Mourn not, Meed, nor make thy lament;
We will counsel the king, and thy course direct;
Thou shalt wed at thy will, and thy wishes obtain
Though Conscience's craft may be cunning to hinder!"

Mildly then Meed said "gramercy!" to all 20
For their great goodness, and gave them each one
Great vessels of gold, and goblets of silver,
Rings with red rubies, and rich gifts many;
The least of the crew had a gold crown-piece.
Then took they their leave, these lordlings, of Meed. 25

Then came to her clerks, to comfort her also,
And bade her be blithe; "for we be thine own,
To work all thy will, the while that thou livest."

Politely the lady then promised the same,
"I will loyally love you, and make you all lords; 30
In council, at court, I will call out your names;
Though wanting in wisdom, no wight that I love
Shall be left in the lurch; for my lore is well heeded,
While clerks that are cunning may hobble behind!"

Then came a confessor, with cope like a friar, 35
To Meed, that maiden, he muttered these words,
Saying full softly, in shrift as it were,
“ Though laymen and learned had loved thee alike,
And falsehood had followed thee for fifty years,
I soon would assoil thee, for a sackful of wheat, 40
And e'en be thy beadsman, and bear well thine errands,
The conscience of knights and of clerks to pervert.”

Then Meed, for her misdeeds, to that man knelt,
And shrove her of sinfulness, shameless, I ween.
She told him a tale, and tendered him a ‘ noble,’ 45
To be both her beadsman and her broker also.
Right soon he assoiled her, and afterwards said :—
“ We are working a window, much wealth will it cost ;
Wouldst thou glaze that gable, and grave there thy name,
Safe were thy soul to ascend unto heaven ! ” 50

“ Wist I that,” quoth the woman, “ I would not spare
To befriend you, sir friar ! nor fail you at need,
While you love such lords as in lechery live,
And blame not the ladies that love well the same.
'Tis a frailty of flesh, as ye find in your books, 55
And the natural course mankind to preserve.
If we 'scape the slander, the scath is soon mended ;

'Tis the sin of all seven the soonest excused.
Have mercy," quoth Meed, "upon men that pursue it,
And I'll cover your church, and your cloister repair, 60
Whiten your walls, and your windows glaze,
And paint and pourtray them, and pay for the making ;
All that see it shall say I am sister of your house."

But God, to all good men, such 'graving forbids,
To write thus in windows their worthy deeds, 65
Lest pride be there painted, and pomp of the world ;
For Christ knows your conscience and covert intent,
Your craving, your cost, and whence cometh the coin.

Then learn ye, my lords, to leave all such works,
To write thus in windows your worthy deeds ; 70
Nor appeal to the priors when dealing your doles,
Lest your hire and your heaven be here upon earth :—

Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth
(Matt. vi. 3).

' Let never thy left hand, early or late,
Wit what thou workest with thy right side ; '
For thus, saith the gospel, the good shall do alms. 75

Ye mace-men and mayors, that are midmost between
The king and the commons, now keep well the laws,
And punish on pillories and penitence-stools

Brewers and bakers, and butchers and cooks ;
Such men, on this mould, can most harm work 80
To the poorer people, that piece-meal buy ;
For they poison the people, both privily and oft,
Grow rich by retailing, and house-rents buy
With profits that else would support the poor.
If true were their trade, they would triumph the less, 85
And buy them no buildings—be ye well sure.

But Meed the maid the mayor had besought
Of all such sellers some silver to take,
Or gifts without money, as goblets of silver,
Rings, and rich presents, retailers to please. 90

“For my love,” said that lady, “pray, love them each one,
And suffer them sell things dishonestly dear.”

But Solomon the sage a sermon has made,
For amending the mayors, and men that give laws,
And told us the tale that I tell you here :— 95

Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery (Job xv. 34).
To them that are learned the Latin expresses,
That fire shall fall, and the flames consume
The houses and homes of the head men in office,
Who presents or profits improperly seek.—

The king came from council, and called to him Meed, 100
And sent for her soon, and the sergeants appeared,
Who brought her with joy to a blissful bower.

Then kindly the king, and with courteous words,
To Meed the maiden his message began :—
“Unwittily, woman, thou often hast wrought, 105
But worst was thy choice, when thou cholest Sir False.
I forgive thee that guilt, and grant thee my grace ;
Henceforth, till thy death-day, do so no more !

I’ve a knight, named Conscience, late come from afar ;
If he wooes thee for wife, say, wilt thou him wed ?” 110
“Yea, lord !” quoth the lady, “the Lord forbid else !
I am wholly at your hest ; else hang me at once !”
Then Conscience was called, to come and appear
Before king and council, the clerks and the others.
Low kneeling, Sir Conscience the king saluted, 115
To wit what his will were, and what he should do.

“Wilt wed this woman, by my will and assent ?
She is fain of thy fellowship, thy wife for to be.”

Quoth Conscience to the king—“Now Christ it forbid !
Ere I wed such a wife, may woe me betide ! 120
She is frail in her faith, and fickle of speech,

And maketh men misdo many score times ;
 Trust in her treasure betrayeth full many.
 To wives and to widows she wantonness teacheth ;
 Soon lechery learn they, who love well her gifts. 125
 Your father she felled by her false deceits ;
 She hath poisoned popes, and impaired holy church ;
 There is no better bawd, by Him that me made,
 Between heaven and hell, in the whole wide earth ;
 She is loose in her living, and lavish of speech, 130
 As common as the cart-way to carters and knaves,
 To monks and to minstrels, and miscreants base.
 Assize-men and sumners, and such men praise her ;
 Sheriffs of shires were shiftless without her.
 She lures men to lose both their lands and their lives. 135
 She plucks men from prison, and pays for them often,
 Gives gold to the jailers, and groats of silver,
 To unfetter the false men, to flee where they please.
 The true she attaches, and ties them in bonds,
 And hangs men, for hatred, who never did harm. 140

To be cursed by a council she counts not a rush,
 But clothes the commissary, gives coats to his clerks,
 And as soon is assoiled, as it pleaseth herself.
 She may nigh do as much in a single month
 As your secret seal may in six-score days. 145

She persuadeth the pope, as provisors can tell ;
Simony and herself put seals on their bulls.

She blesseth the bishops, though base and unlearned,
Gives prebends to parsons, and priests she permits
To have lemans and lovers as long as they live, 150
Who bring forth bairns—though the law forbids.
When she's well with the king, then woe to the realm !
For she favours the false, and defeats the true.
With her gems and her jewels the judge she corrupts,
Lies against the law, and limits its way, 155
Till faith has no force, where her florins abound.
She leads law at pleasure, and 'lovedays' appoints ;
Men lose, for her love, what the law might win ;
The poor man is posed, though he plead for ever ;
Since law is so lordly, so loath to make end, 160
Without presents or pence she pleases but few.

Barons and burgesses she brings into sorrow,
And foileth the folk that would fain live in truth ;
Clerkship and coveting she couples together.
Thus liveth that lady ! The Lord give her sorrow ; 165
And men that maintain her, mischance them betide !
The poor have no pow'r to complain, though they smart,
Such a mistress is Meed among men that are rich."

Then Meed began mourn, and bemoan to the king,
That leave might be lent her, her life to excuse. 170

The king, of his goodness, then granted her grace :—
“Excuse, if thou canst ; I cannot say more ;
For Conscience accuses, to cast thee aside.”

“Nay, lord !” quoth that lady, “believe him the less,
When I tell you the truth, where the true wrong lies. 175
Where mischief is most, there Meed may avail !
Thou knowest, Sir Conscience, I come not to chide
Or deprave thy person, with a proud heart.
Consent, thou deceiver, the sooth to admit,
Thou hast lain in my lap some eleven times, 180
And hast grasped at my gold, to give where you pleased.
Thy present displeasure surprises us all !
More gifts will I give, when grant them I may,
And maintain thee as master, yea ! more than thou knowest !
Thou hast foully defamed me, before the king here !—185
I killed never king, no such counsel I gave,
Nor wrought as thou say’st ; to himself I appeal !

He ne’er was in Normandy annoyed by my means ;
But soothly, thyself oft his shame didst achieve ;
Didst creep under cover, so cold were thy nails, 190
Didst ween that the winter would weigh on thee ever,

Didst dread to be dead, so dim was the weather,
And homeward didst hie thee, lest hunger should end thee.

Thou didst ruthlessly rob men, and ravage the land,
And carry their chattels to Calais to sell. 195
I stood by my lord there, his life for to save ;
I made his men merry, their mourning to mend ;
I patted their backs, and emboldened their hearts,
Till they jumped for joy, to enjoy mine aid.
Had *I* been his marshal, his men to command, 200
I'd have laid my life, and no less a pledge,
He'd have held that land, in length and in breadth,
As king of that country, his kindred to aid,
Till each brat of his blood were a baron's peer ! 204
Thou, coward-like, Conscience, didst counsel him thence,
To relinquish his lordship, for a little silver,
That richest of realms that the rain sweeps over !

It becometh a king, who a kingdom rules,
To give meed unto men that meekly him serve,
To aliens and all men, and honour them with gifts ; 210
Meed makes him beloved, a man to be honoured.
Emperors and earls, and all kinds of lords,
For gifts, have their young men to run and to ride.
The pope and all prelates rich presents receive,

Giving meed in return, to maintain their laws. 215
 Servants, for service, we see well the sooth,
 Take meed from their masters, as meetest appears ;
 Beggars beseech men for meed, as a boon ;
 Minstrels, for mirth, claim meed for reward ;
 The king hath his meed for maintaining the peace ; 220
 Tutors, for teaching, take pupils' fees ;
 Priests ever preach to the people for pay,
 For mass-pence, and meat when the mealtime comes.
 For 'prentices, craftsmen their payments crave ;
 Merchants and meed ever meet well together ; 225
 No wight that's in want in this world long lives."

The king said to Conscience, " I can but admit
 That Meed is well worthy the mast'ry to have."

To the king quoth Conscience (and knelt on the earth)—
 " There are meeds in two manners, my lord, by your leave !
 One, God of his grace and in mercy granteth 231
 To well-doing workers, the while they are here,
 As the prophet has preached, and put in the Psalter,
Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle ? (Ps. xv. 1) :—
 ' Who shall dwell in Thy house with Thy holy saints,
 Or Thy holiest hills inhabit ? '—he asketh. 235
 And solves it himself, as the Psalter saith—
He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness (Ps. xv. 2).

The spotless shall enter, the simple of heart,
With reason and right who their works have wrought,
Who never have used usurious ways,
And impart to the poor, and pursue the truth:— 240

*He that putteth not his money to usury, nor taketh reward
against the innocent (Ps. xv. 5):—*

Give help to the harmless, and hold with the righteous,
Unquerdoned do good, and guide men to truth—
Such manner of men have the former meed
From God, when they go hence, the Judge to behold.

But the measureless meed which masters desire, 245
Who makers of mischief maintain for bribes,
Thereof saith the psalter in a psalm's end,

*In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of
bribes (Ps. xxvi. 10):*

He that graspeth gold (so God be my help)
Shall abide it bitterly, or the Book is false.

Priests and all parsons, who pleasures desire, 250
Taking meed and money for masses they sing,
Have their meed upon earth, as St. Matthew teaches:—

Verily I say unto you, they have their reward (Matt. vi. 5).

What labourers and low folk receive of their masters
Is no manner of meed, but a measurable hire.

No meed is in merchandise, so may I avow, 255
'Tis a plain permutation, one pen'orth for another.

Hast thou read not, in 'Kings,' thou recreant Meed,
Why punishment fell upon Saul and his sons?
God sent unto Saul, by Samuel the prophet,
That Agag of Amalek, and all of his people 260
Must die for a deed that their elders had done.
Said Samuel to Saul, 'God Himself thee commands,
Obey now His bidding, His will to fulfil.
To Amalek hie with thy host, and there slay
All bold men and beasts, and burn them to death; 265
Both widows and wives, and women and children,
Burn all that thou findest, both farms and folds,
And bear naught away, be it never so worthy
Of meed or of money; but make it away;
Despoil it, nor spare it; so speed thou the better!'

But he coveted the cattle, and sparèd the king, 271
And forbare the beasts, as the Bible telleth,
Though otherwise warned by the prophet to work;
God said unto Samuel, that Saul should die,
And his seed for that sin should shamefully end. 275
Such a ruin to Saul Meed rendered at last;
God hated him ever, and his heirs also.

What hence is concluded, I care not to show ;
Lest aught should annoy you, none end will I make.
'Tis the way of this world with those that have power, 280
Who says what is soothest, the soonest hath blame.

I, Conscience, this know, as Common-sense taught,
That Reason shall reign, and govern all realms ;
As happened to Agag, shall happen to others ;
A Samuel shall slay them, and Saul shall be blamed, 285
And a diadem'd David be deemed supreme ;
One Christian king shall be chief over all.

No more then shall Meed be a master, as now,
But Lowness and Love, and Loyalty also
Be masters on earth, to maintain the truth ! 290

Who is traitor to Truth, or takes what He claims,
Loyalty alone shall judge him by law.
No sergeant for service shall silk hood wear,
Nor furnish his cloak with fur, when he pleads.
For Meed of misdoers makes many a lord, 295
And against lords' laws misruleth a realm.

But Kind-love shall come yet, and Conscience also,
And make Law a labourer ; such love shall arise,

Such peace among people, such perfect truth,
That Jews shall well ween, and be wondrous glad, 300
That Messiah or Moses amidst us is here,
And muse in their minds why men are so true !

He that beareth a cutlass, a broad sword, or lance,
An ax or a hatchet, or any such weapon
To death shall be doomed, or must duly recast it 305
As sickle or scythe, as share or as coulter :

They shall beat their swords into plough-shares (Isa. ii. 4).
Each shall play with a plough, a pickax or spade,
Or spin, or spread dung ; or perish in sloth.

Parsons and priests shall their prayerbooks ply,
Ever dealing with David each day, until eve ; 310
If hawking or hunting shall hinder his work,
Of his boasted benefice bare be he shorn !
Neither king, nor knight, constable, nor mayor
Shall the commons oppress, or shall summon to court,
Or put them in pannel, to pledge their truth ; 315
As the deed is done, shall the doom be given,
Guilty or not guilty, as Truth shall decide.

King's court and common court, consistory and chapter,
All shall be *one* court, and *one* baron judge ;
And True-tongue be mine, who a traitor was never. 320

No battles shall be, nor bearing of weapons,
But smiths, forging arms, shall be smitten to death :—
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation (Isa. ii. 4).

Ere this fortune shall fall, men will find disaster
By six suns and a ship, and a half-sheaf of arrows ;
And the middle of a moon shall make Jews repent, 325
And Saracens, for that sight, sing ‘Glory to God,’
For Mohammed and Meed both shall meet with mishap :—
A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches”
(Prov. xxii. 1).—

As wroth as the wind waxed Meed, in a while,
“No Latin I know, but the learned know truth ;
See what Solomon says, in sapient words, 330
‘To men that give gifts chief honours are granted,
And worship therewith,’ saith the Holy Word :—
He who gives gifts shall acquire honour” (Prov. xxii. 9).

“I believe thee, my lady ; thy Latin is true ;
Thou’rt like to a lady, that read once a lesson, 334
’Twas—‘prove ye well all things’ ; and pleased was her heart,
For the line was no longer, at end of the leaf.
Had she looked any longer, or turned the leaf over,
More words had she found there, that follow close after,

‘Hold fast what is good’—God gave us that text

(1 Thess. v. 21).

Right so hast thou fared; thou couldst find no more 340

When ye sat in your study, and Solomon read.

The text thou hast told of is good for the great;

But there lacked one of learning, the leaf for to turn!

Look forth yet again; ye shall find what doth follow,

A text that sore taxes the takers of bribes:— 345

But they take away the souls of them that receive them

(Prov. xxii. 9):—

’Tis the tail of the text thou hast taken as true;

For, though we win worship with meed, as I ween,

The soul that takes bribes is in bondage thereby.”

PASSUS IV.

MEED AND REASON.

“**C**EASE,” said the king, “I suffer you no longer ;
Be reconciled, soothly, and serve me alike.

Kiss her,” quoth the king, “Conseience, I bid thee !”

“Nay, sir king,” quoth Conscience, “excuse me for ever ;
Save Reason direct me, I rather would die !” 5

“I command thee,” quoth the king unto Conscience then,
“Make ready to ride, and Reason fetch hither,
Command him to come, my counsel to hear !
He shall rule my realm, and direct me the best,
And account for thee, Conscience, so Christ be my guide ! 10
How thou ledest the people, both learnèd and poor.”

“ I accord to that counsel,” quoth Conscience then ;
To Reason he rode, and rehearsed in his ear,
And said all his errand, and soon took his leave. 14

“ I shall array me to ride,” quoth Reason, “ now rest thee,”
And called Cato his servant, so courteous of speech,
And also Tom True-tongue-tell-me-no-tales-
Nor-lies-for-to-laugh-at-I-lovèd-them-never ;
“ Set my saddle on Suffer-till-I-see-my-time,
And gird him with girths made of witty words, 20
Hang heavy reins on him, to hold his head low,
Lest he whinny and wince more than once on his way.”

Then Conscience on his courser went quickly from thence,
And argued with Reason, as onward they rode,
How Meed, as a master, was mighty on earth. 25

And next Warren Wisdom, with Witty his friend,
Followed them fast, for they fain would repair
To exchequer and chancery, suits to discharge.
They rode on, that Reason might rule their affairs,
And save them, for silver, from shame and from harms. 30

But Conscience well knew they were covetous both,
Bade Reason ride onward, and reck not of either ;
“ There are wiles in their words, and with Meed do they dwell ;

Where wrath is and wrangling, they reap many profits,
But loyalty and love they are loath to approach. 35

Destruction and unhappiness is in their ways (Ps. xiv. 7).

They give not, for God's sake, a goose's wing ;

There is no fear of God before their eyes ; (Ps. xiv. 7).

They would, doubtless, do more for a dozen chickens,

For so many capons, or a cart-load of oats,

Than for love of the Lord, or the love of His saints.

Then, Reason, let rich men go ride by themselves, 40

For Conscience and Christ contemn them, I trow."

Then Reason fast rode on the right highway ;

As Conscience had counselled, they came to the king.

Courteously the king then came to meet Reason,

'Twixt himself and his son he set him on the bench, 45

And well wisely discoursed for a while together.

Then came Peace into parliament, and put forth a plea,
How Wrong, 'gainst his will, had abducted his wife,

Had borne away Rose, Sir Reginald's love,

And Malkin the maiden, with merciless force— 50

"My geese and my swine his serving-men steal,

I dare not, for fear of him, fight or complain.

My bay horse he borrowed, and brought him home never,

For pence, in repayment, I pleaded in vain.
His men he maintaineth, to murder my hinds, 55
Forestalleth my fairs, and fights in my market,
Breaks up my barn-doors, and bears away wheat,
Tenders a tally for ten quarters of oats,
Mauls me with bruises, maltreats my maid ;
I scarce have the boldness his presence to bear.” 60

The king gave him credit, for Conscience had told him
That Wrong was a robber, who wrought many harms.

Then Wrong was well wary, and Wisdom besought
To make peace with his pence, and proffered him many ;—
“Were I lief to my lord, but little I’d reck 65
Though Peace and his party complainèd for ever !”

Then Wisdom awoke, and Sir Warren the witty,
Since Wrong had thus wrought such a robber-like deed,
And warned well Sir Wrong with their wisest skill :—
“Whoso worketh too wilfully, waketh men’s wrath ; 70
We say it of thyself, full soon shalt thou find it ;
Let Meed make amends, or mischief is near ;
Both thy life and thy land now lie in his grace.”

Then readily Wrong wooed Wisdom to help ;
To make peace with his pence a huge forfeit he paid. 75

Then Wisdom and Witty went forward together,
And took with them Meed, some mercy to win.

Peace put forth his head, for his poll was bloody :—
“ All guiltless, God knoweth, I got me this wound ;
Conscience and the commons consent to this truth.” 80

Yet Wisdom and Witty went boldly about
To conquer the king with coins, if they might.

But the king by the cross and his crown swore,
That Wrong for his works much woe should endure,
And commanded a constable to cast him in irons :— 85
“ He shall not, in seven years, see his feet once ! ”

“ God wot,” said Sir Wisdom, “ that were but amiss ;
If he makes good amends, let mercy take bail
To proffer safe pledges, and pay for his sin,
And amend his misdeeds, and be evermore better.” 90

Wit accorded therewith, and decided the same :—
“ ’Tis better with bounty to banish the evil,
Than beat down the evil, while bounty is slighted ! ”

Then Meed ’gan bemoan her, and mercy besought,
And proffered Peace a present of pure red gold :— 95

“Take, man, this of me, to amend thy harms ;
And Wrong will oppress thee, I promise, no more !”

Then Peace, full of pity, ’gan pray to the king
For mercy on the man that misdid him so oft :—
“He hath truly atoned, as Sir Wisdom him taught, 100
I forgive him that guilt, with a right good will.
If the king so assent, I can say nothing more ;
Meed hath made me amends ; and no more can I ask.”

“Nay,” quoth the king then, “so Christ be my help !
Wrong wends not away so ; I wish to know more. 105
If he leapt hence so lightly, he’d laugh evermore,
And be but the bolder my servants to beat.
Save Reason have ruth, he shall rest in the stocks
As long as he lives, save he lowly submits.”

Some wrought with Sir Reason for ruth on that wretch,
To counsel the king, and Conscience as well ; 111
That Meed might be surety, they Reason besought.

“No ruth shall be wrested,” quoth Reason, “from me
Till lords and great ladies alike love Truth,
And keep from their converse all coarseness of speech ; 115
Till costly apparel is kept in the chest,

And children are coddled with chastening rods!
 Till hypocrites holy are held in contempt,
 Clerks covet to feed and to clothe the poor,
 And religious roamers remain in their cloisters 120
 As Saint Bennet first bade them, and Bernard and Francis;
 Till the preaching of prelates be proved in themselves,
 And the councils of kings seek the common good;
 Till bishops sell horses, to buy beggars huts,
 And their hawks and their hounds go to help the poor; 125
 Till Saint James shall be sought only where I assign;
 Who goes to Gallicia must go there for ever.
 Let all runners to Rome, to the robbers therein
 Bear no silver o'er sea, that shows the king's image,
 Neither silver nor gold, ungraven or graven, 130
 Or forfeit the coinage, when found out at Dover;
 Save merchants and their men, or messengers with letters,
 Provisors or priests, or penitent sinners.

By the rood," quoth Reason, "no ruth will I show,
 While Meed, in this moot-hall, hath mastery still. 135
 I could cite some examples, as seen now and then;
 And I say for myself, if so it might be
 I were crowned as a king, to keep well a realm,
 No wrong in this world that I well could arrest
 Should pass hence unpunished, on peril of my soul, 140

Nor grace have for gifts, so God may defend me!
Nor have mercy for Meed, till he meekly submit.
*‘No evil should ever unpunished remain,
Nor good unrewarded’*—so goes the old saw:
Let priests, without comment, this precept expound. 145
If ye put it in practice, I pledge both my ears,
That Law will turn labourer, leas to manure,
And Love lead thy land, as were liefest he should!”

Priests, thus appealed to, their heads put together
To construe that clause for the king’s sole profit, 150
Not for comfort of the commons, nor yet the king’s soul.
I saw Meed, in the moot-hall, on men of law wink,
Who leapt to her, laughing, and Reason they left.
Sir Warren Wisdom then winked at the lady,
“Your man am I, madam! whate’er my mouth utters; 155
I fall in with florins, and fail in my speech!”

The righteous recorded that Reason said truth,
And Wit too accorded, commending his words;
While most men in hall, and many of the great
Said Meekness was master, and Meed was accurst. 160

Love liked her but little, and Loyalty less;
And said it so high, that the whole hall heard;

“He that wisheth to wed her, for wealth of her goods,
Men will call him a cuckold, or cut off my nose!”

Then Meed began mourning, and made sad lament 165
That the chief of the commons accounted her frail;
But a summoner sought her, and so did assize-men,
And a clerk of a sheriff beshrewed all the rout;
“I have helped you full often,” quoth he, “at the bar,
Though ne’er did ye give me the gift of a rush!” 170

The king called for Conscience; with Reason he came;
They recorded that Reason had rightly adjudged.
Moodily on Meed looked the king, in his might,
And was angry with Law, whom Meed had misled,
Saying, “Law, by your laxness I lose my escheats; 175
Meed masters the lawyers, and muzzles the truth.
Yet Reason shall rule, if I reign any longer,
And deem, by this day! every doom by desert:
No Meed shall buy bail, by Saint Mary in heaven!
But laws shall be loyal, not laden with cavil, 180
And Wrong by the righteous be rightly condemned.”

Quoth Conscience to the king, “Save the commons assent,
’Twill be hard, by my head, such a process to hold,
To lead, as you list, all your lieges aright!”

But Reason replied—"By the holy rood, 185
Save I rule thus your realm, you may rend out my ribs!
Now bid men's obedience to bide with me ever."

"I assent," quoth the king, "by Saint Mary my lady,
When my council has come, both of clerks and of earls.
Now rest thee, Sir Reason, and ride not away; 190
As long as I live, will I leave thee no more."

"I am ready," quoth Reason, "to rest with you ever,
Be Conscience in our council; I care for no better."

"I assent," quoth the king, "God save us from faults;
As long as life lasteth, hence live we together!" 195

PASSUS V.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

THE king and his knights to the kirk went
To hear matins of the day, and the mass after.
Then I waked from my sleep, and was woful withal
That I had not slept sounder, and seen much more.
Scarce fared I a furlong, ere faintness o'ercame me, 5
Nor further could foot it, for default of repose.
Sat I softly adown, and said my belief,
And babbled o'er my beads ; which brought me asleep.

Then saw I much more than I marked hitherto ;
The field full of folk I saw, as before, 10
Where Reason was ready to preach to the realm ;
With a cross, 'fore the king, he commenced his teaching.

He proved that the pestilences were purely for sin,
And the south-west wind, on Saturday at even,
Was plainly for our pride, and for no point else. 15
Pear-trees and plum-trees were puffed to the earth
For example to sinners, to serve God better.
Beeches and broad oaks were blown to the ground,
Turning upward their tails, as a token of dread
That deadly sin, at doomsday, would condemn us all. 20

I might, of this matter, be muttering long ;
But I say what I saw—so God be my help !—
How plainly Sir Reason 'gan preach to the people.

He bade Waster to work at what he knew best,
To win what he wasted, with wise employ. 25
Maid Parnel he prayed fine apparel to leave,
And keep it in chests, as a chattel at need.
Tom Stow then he taught to take two staves,
And fight for his Phyllis, when ducked for a scold !

He warned also Wat that his wife was to blame, 30
For her head cost a half-mark, his hood not a groat.
He bade also Bat cut a bough or e'en twain,
And beat Betty therewith, unless she would work.
He charged also chapmen to chasten their children,

Not spoil them, though wealthy, the while they were young,
Nor please them too fondly, in pestilence-time. 36

“ My sire to me said once, and so did my dame,
‘ The liefer the child, the more lore it behoveth ; ’
And Solomon likewise, in Sapience, wrote,

He that spareth his rod hateth his son (Prov. xiii. 24).

The sense of this saying, if some one would know, 40
Is, ‘ who spareth the birch-sprig, his children he spoileth. ’ ”

And next he prayed prelates and priests together,
“ What ye preach to the people, first prove on yourselves,
And do so in deed ; it will draw you to good ;
If ye live by your lore, we believe you the better. ” 45

Religion he counselled his rule to observe,
“ Lest the king and his council your ‘ commons ’ impair,
And be stewards of your steads, till ye’re better established. ”

Then he counselled the king the commons to love,
“ ’Tis thy treasure ’gainst treason, an antidote true. ” 50

Then prayed he the pope to have pity on the church ;
Ere he granted a grace, first to govern himself.
“ Ye that laws have to keep, first covet the truth
More than gold or great gifts, if God ye would please.
The traitor to truth has been told in the gospel 55

That neither God knows him, nor saints in the skies :

Verily I say unto you, I know you not (Matt. xxv. 12).
Ye that seek to Saint James, and the saints in Rome,
Seek rather Saint Truth, who can save you all ;
Who with Father and Son :—fair hap them befall 59
Who assent to my sermon ! ”—And thus said Sir Reason.

With that ran Repentance, rehearsing the text,
And making Will weep many watery tears.

The Confession of Pride.

Maid Parnel Proud-heart fell prone on the earth,
Lying long ere she looked up, and “ Lord, mercy ! ” cried.
She vowed then a vow to the Father in heaven, 65
Her smock to unsow, and a hair-shirt to wear,
To enfeeble her flesh, that so fierce was to sin :—
“ Shall no high heart upheave me ; I’ll hold myself low,
And suffer men slight me—and so did I never !
I pray for more meekness, and mercy beseech 70
For all I have hitherto hated in heart.”

The Confession of Lechery.

Then said Lecher, “ Alas ! ”—to our Lady he cried
To have mercy, for misdeeds, ’twixt God and his soul,
And said that on Saturdays, seven years after, 74
He would drink with the duck, and would dine only once !

The Confession of Envy.

Next Envy, with heavy heart, asked to have shrift ;
As a sorrowful sinner his sins he confessed.
He was pale as a stone, in a palsy he seemed,
And clothed in a coarse suit I scarce can describe,
In a short coat and kirtle, a knife by his side. 80
Of a friar's frock were the two fore-sleeves ;
Like a leek that has lain too long in the sun
He looked, with his lean cheeks, lowering on all.
With wrath swelled his body, he bit both his lips,
Fast clenching his fists ; to avenge him he thought 85
With works or with words, still awaiting his time.
He uttered his tales with an adder's tongue ;
Chiding and challenging chose he as food ;
To backbite and blacken, and bear false witness
Was his care and his courtesy, whereso he came. 90

“I'd be shriven,” quoth this shrew, “if for shame I might dare ;
My gladness is greater, when Gib fares amiss,
Than in winning a wey of your fine Essex cheese !

I've a neighbour full nigh, I annoy him full oft,
And belie him to lords, till he loses his pelf ; 95
His friends are made foes through my false report ;
His gains and his good luck oft grieve me full sore.

'T'wixt household and household such hatred I raise
That both lives and limbs have been lost by my means.
When I meet him at market whom most I detest, 100
I heartily hail him in haste, as a friend ;
He's more doughty than I, so I dare do naught else ;
Had I mast'ry and might, God knows my desire !

When I come to the kirk, and should kneel to the cross,
And pray for the people, as teacheth the priest, 105
For pilgrims and palmers, and people at large,
Then I cry on my knees, 'may Christ give him sorrow
Who bore off my bowl, or my broken plate !'
Away from the altar then turn I mine eyes,
And note how Elaine hath a new-made gown ; 110
I wish it were mine, with the rest of the web.

I laugh when men lose, for that my heart liketh ;
I weep when they win, and bewail the time ;
I doom the ill-doer, myself doing worse ;
With him that upbraids me I'm angry for ever. 115
I would that each wight were my servant and slave ;
Who hath what I have not, him hate I full sore.
Thus loveless I live, like a low-bred cur,
That my body nigh bursts for bitterest gall.

I oft cannot eat, as a man ought to do, 120
For envy and ill-will are hard to digest.
Can no sugar nor sweet thing assuage my swelling,
Nor medicinal drug drive it out of my heart,
Nor yet shrift nor shame, save my maw be scraped ? ”

“Yes; readily,” said Repentance, “this rule is the best—
Sorrow for sins is salvation of souls.” 126

“I am sorry,” quoth that sinner, “I am seldom aught else;
This makes me so meagre—I miss my revenge!
I have been among burgesses, dwelling in London,
Getting brokers to backbite and blame men’s ware. 130”

If my neighbour could sell, while I sold not, right soon
Would I lower and lie, and lay on him blame.
I’ll amend, if I may, by th’ Almighty’s help ! ”

The Confession of Wrath.

Now Wrath awaketh, with two white eyes;
He snivelled with his nose, with a neck low bent. 135

“I am Wrath,” quoth he; “I once was a friar,
And the convent-gardener, to graft young shoots.
On ‘limiters’ and ‘lectors’ such lies I engrafted,
They bore leaves of low-speech, great lords for to please,

And then blossomed abroad, to hear shrifts in bowers, 140
Till there fell this fruit—that folk would far rather
Show shrifts unto them, than be shriven by priests.

Now that priests have perceived how friars claim part,
These prebend'ries preach, and deprave the friars.
Then friars find fault, as the folk bear witness, 145
And preach to the people in places around ;
I, Wrath, with them rove, and teach them to rail.
Thus clerks of the church one another contemn
Till both are but beggars, and live by their begging,
Or else all are rich, and go riding about. 150
I, Wrath, never rest, but rove evermore,
And follow these false ones ; for such is my grace.

My aunt is a nun, and an abbess to boot ;
She sooner would swoon than once suffer a pain.
I was cook in her kitchen, the convent I served 155
For many a month ; and with monks have I stayed ;
Made pottage for the prioress, and other poor dames.
Their broth was to backbite—‘ dame Joan is a bastard ’—
‘ Dame Clarice, a knight’s girl, a cuckold’s her sire ’—
‘ Dame Parnel’s a priest’s wench, a prioress never ; 160
She childed in cherry-time, the chapter all know it.’

Their worts I commingled with wicked words,
Till 'liar!' and 'liar!' leapt forth from their lips,
And each hit the other just under the cheek ;
They had dealt many deaths, had daggers been near! 165

Saint Gregory, pope, had a good foreknowledge,
And granted no prioress power to shrive ;
For surely, with women, no secret is safe !

To remain among monks I mostly refuse ;
Too keen are some brothers my counsels to spy, 170
Such as prior, sub-prior, and *pater* the abbot.
If I tell any tales, they take me to task,
And make me fast Fridays on bread and on water.
I am chidden in chapter-house, like to a child,
And beaten on bare flesh, rebuked and abused. 175
With such men to linger small liking is mine ;
Salt fish is their diet, and feeblest of ale.
If wine, once a while, in my way comes at eve,
I defame them, with foul mouth, some five days after.
All sins I had seen any brother consent to 180
I discussed in the cloister ; the convent soon knew them."

"Repent," quoth Repentance ; "rehearse nevermore
Such facts as thou findest by favour or right ;

Nor drink over deeply, nor delicate draughts,
Lest rashly thy will unto wrath should incline. 185
Be sober," he said ; and absolved him thereafter,
Bade him weep with good will, and his wickedness mend.

The Confession of Avarice.

Next Coveting came ; whom I scarce can describe ;
So hungry and hollow Sir Harvey appeared.
He had beetling brows, coarse bulging lips, 190
And two bleary eyes, like a blind old hag ;
Like a leathern purse were his loose-hung cheeks,
Lower than his chin low-drooping with age.
His beard, like a boor's, was beslobbered with bacon ;
A hood on his head, and a lousy old hat ; 195
In a tawny tabard, some twelve years old,
All tattered and torn, with lice for its tenants ;—
By nature a louse is a lively leaper,
Or it could not have crawled on that threadbare cloth.

"I've been covetous," quoth that caitiff, "I confess it here ;
For some time I served old Sim at-the-Stile, 201
And was plighted his 'prentice, his profit to serve.
First learnt I, in lying, a lesson or twain ;
Wickedly to weigh was my first lesson ;
To Weyhill and Winchester I went to the fair 205

With all manner of wares, as my master bade ;
If Guile had not given some grace to my ware,
It had still been unsold, were it seven years since !

Then I drew me to drapers, my duties to learn,
To stretch out the stuff, till it looked the longer. 210
One lesson I learnt as to long striped cloths ;
To pierce them with a needle, and piece them together,
Put them in a press, and press them thereunder
Till ten yards or twelve were turned to thirteen !

My wife was a weaver, and woollen cloth made ; 215
She spoke to the spinners to spin it well out ;
But the pound that she paid by surpassed by a quarter
The standard of weight that the steelyard gave !
I barley-malt bought her, she brewed it to sell,
Thick ale and thin ale she thoroughly mingled 220
For labourers and low folk ; this lay by itself.
The best ale in bower or bed-room we kept ;
He that tasted thereof was contented to buy it,
A groat for a gallon ; he gave never less ;
Yet it came forth in cups ; such craft would she use. 225
Rose the Retailer she rightly was named ;
The trade of a huckster is hers, as at first.
I swear now, so thrive I ! that sin will I leave,

Nor chaffer so falsely, nor false measures use,
But wend unto Walsingham, and with me my wife, 230
And pray Bromholm-rood to reprove me from sin."

"Hast never repented, nor made restitution?"

"Yes; once was I housed with a host of chapmen;
I rose while they rested, and rifled their bags."

"That was no restitution, but a robber's deed; 235
For which thou more highly hast claim to be hanged
Than for all the misdeeds thou hast hitherto done."

"I thought theft 'restitution'; for read could I never;
Such French as I know is of further Norfolk."

"Was usury ever a usage of thine?" 240

"Nay, soothly!" he answered, "except in my youth.
I learnt among Lombards and Jews this lesson,
To weigh the king's pence, and the heavy ones pare,
And lend them (to lose them) for love of the pledge;
So I worded the deed, if the day should be broken. 245
More manors are mine through arrears than mercy."

I have lent things to lords, and to ladies also,
And then been their broker, and bought them myself.
Exchanges and loans are the chaffer I deal with.

When I lend, of each noble a portion they lose ; 250
And with letters of Lombards bear money to Rome,
Here take it by tally, there tell it as less."

"Hast lent aught to lords, for love of their aid ?"
"I have lent oft to lords, that ne'er loved me thereafter,
And made of a knight both a mercer and draper 255
Who paid, as apprentice, not one pair of gloves !"

"Hast thou pity on poor men, persuaded to borrow ?"
"Such pity on poor men, as a pedlar on cats ;
Could he catch them, he'd kill them ; he covets their skins."

"Dost deal out to neighbours thy drink and thy meat ?"
"I'm as courteous," he cried, "as a cur in a kitchen ; 261
Such a name, among neighbours, is noted as mine !"

"Now God never grant thee, unless thou repent,
His grace, on this ground, thy goods to bestow,
Nor thine heirs have, after thee, aught of thy gains, 265
Nor executors spend well the silver thou leavest !
What was wrongfully won will be wickedly spent.
Were I friar of a house, where faith is and love,
Thy coin should not clothe us, nor our kirk amend,
Nor a penny of thine should our pittance improve 270
For the best book we have, though bright gold were the leaves,

If I knew for a sooth thou wert such as thou sayest,
Or could witness, by watching, thy works and thy ways.

' Seek a man's feasts, and you serve him as slave ;

Live on thy loaf, and thy life then is free !' 275

Thou'rt a creature unkind, whom I cannot assoil

Till thou make restitution, and reckon with all.

Till Reason enroll, i' th' register of heaven,

Thou hast made full amends, I may not absolve thee :—

The sin is not remitted, till the stolen thing be restored.

All that gain by thy goods, so God have my troth ! 280

At the high day of doom, must help thee restore.

Who sees not this sooth, let him seek in the Psalter,

In *Miserere-mei*, that I mean the truth :—

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts (Ps. li. 6).

No workman i' th' world shall thrive on thy winnings ;

Cum sancto eris sanctus ; expound that in English :— 285

With the holy thou shalt be holy (Ps. xviii. 25).

Then lost he all hope, and himself would have hanged,
Had not quickly Repentance the wretch reassured—

“ Keep mercy in mind, and with mouth implore it ;

God's mercy is more than His mightiest works :—

His mercy is over all his works (Ps. cxlv. 9).

All the wickedness i' th' world that men work or devise 290

Is no more, to God's mercy, than sparks in the main :—

*All iniquity, compared with God's mercy, is as a spark in
the midst of the sea.*

Keep mercy in mind, and thy merchandise leave ;
Thou hast no better way to win thee a loaf
Than by aid of thy tongue or thy two good hands.
The gain thou hast gotten began with deceit, 295
And while buying therewith, thou wast borrowing ever !

If thou wit not whereby or to whom to restore,
Bear it to the bishop ; beseech him, of grace,
To bestow it himself as is best for thy soul.
He shall answer for thee, at the awful doom, 300
For thee and for many that man shall account—
As his lore was in Lent (believe this is true)—
How the Lord's grace he lent you, to lead you from sin."

The Confession of Gluttony.

Now beginneth Sir Glutton to go to his shrift ;
His course is to kirkward, as culprit to pray. 305
But Betty the brewster just bade him " Good-morrow,"
And asked him therewith as to whither he went.

" To holy church haste I, to hear me a mass,
And straight to be shriven, and sin nevermore."
" Good ale have I, gossip ; Sir Glutton, assay it ! " 310

“But hast thou hot spices at hand, in thy bag?”

“I have pepper and pæony-seed, and a pound of garlick,
And a farthingworth of fennel-seed, for fasting-days.”

Then Glutton goes in, and with him great oaths.
Cicely the shoe-seller sat on the bench, 315
The warrener Wat, and his wife also,
Timothy the tinker, with two of his lads,
The hackney-man Hick, the needle-man Hugh,
Clarice of Cock-lane, the clerk of the church,
Davy the ditcher, and a dozen others; 320
Sir Piers the priest, and Parnel of Flanders,
A fiddler, a ratcatcher, a Cheapside raker,
A rider, a rope-seller, dish-selling Rose,
Godfrey of Garlickhithe, Griffin of Wales;
And a heap of upholsterers, early assembled, 325
Gave Glutton, with glad cheer, a treat of good ale.

Then Clement, the cobbler, cast off his cloak,
Which he offered to any, by way of exchange;
Hick the hackney-man hitched off his hood,
And bade Bat the butcher to be on his side. 330
Then chapmen were chosen the choice to appraise;
He that hath but the hood shall have more for amends.

Two rose up in haste, and reasoned together,
Appraising these pen'orths apart by themselves.
They could not, in conscience, accord together 335
Till Robin the roper arose from his place,
And was ordered, as umpire, to end the dispute,
And tell the true value between them at last.

So Hickey the ostler laid hold of the cloak,
In covenant that Clement should fill up his cup, 340
And have Hick's hood, the ostler's, and hold him content ;
Who soonest repented must after arise,
And grant to Sir Glutton a gallon of ale.

There was laughing and lowering, and "let go the cup!"
They sat so till evensong, and sung now and then, 345
Till Glutton had gulped down a gallon and a gill. . . .
He neither could step, nor without a staff stand ;
Then began he to go like a gleeman's dog,
Sometimes aside, and sometimes arear,
Like one that lays lines, young larks to ensnare. 355

As he drew to the door, then dim grew his eyes,
He was tripp'd by the threshold and thrown to the earth.
Clement the cobbler him caught by the middle,
To lift him aloft, and him laid on his knees ;

But Glutton, that great churl, was grievous to lift, 360
And coughed up a caudle in Clement's lap;
So hungry no hound is in Hertfordshire lane
As would lap up the leavings, unlovely of scent.

With all woe in the world his wife and his wench
Bore him home to his bed, and brought him therein. 365
And after this surfeit he slept, in his sloth,
All Saturday and Sunday, till sunset had come.
Then woke he in wonder, and wiped both his eyes;
The word he first uttered was—"Where is the bowl?"
His wife sadly warned him, how wicked his ways, 370
And Repentance full rightly rebuked him of sin:—
"Both in words and in works thou hast wrought much evil,
Now shrive thee with shame, and show me thy sins."

"I, Glutton," he granted, "am guilty indeed;
I have trespassed with tongue, I can tell not how oft, 375
Have sworn 'by God's soul,' and 'so help me the saints,'
Where never was need, nine hundred of times.
I'd a surfeit at supper, and sometimes at noon,
Till I, Glutton, it gulped up, ere gone was a mile,
And spilt what should spared be, and spent on the hungry.
Too delicately, on fast-days, I drank and ate both, 381
And sat sometimes so long that I slept while I ate.

To hear tales, in taverns, to drink more, I dined,
And feasted ere noon, when the fasting-days came."

"This showing of shrift shall be to thy merit." 385

Then Glutton 'gan groan ; great mourning he made
For the loathsome life he had lived such a while ;
And vowed he would fast :—"For hunger or thirst
Shall no fish on the Friday be found in my maw
Till Abstinence, my aunt, hath accorded me leave ; 390
And yet have I hitherto hated her ever !"

The Confession of Sloth.

Then came Sloth all beslobbered, with two slimy eyes,
"I must sit," quoth this sinner, "or else shall I doze ;
I stand not, nor stoop, nor kneel without stool.
Were I brought to my bed, save for bitterest need, 395
Should no ringing arouse me, ere ripe time for dinner."

Benedicite he began, and smote on his breast ;
He grumbled, and stretched him, and grunted at last.

"Awake !" quoth Repentance, "make ready for shrift."

"This day should I die, no duties for me ! 400
Paternoster I know not, as priests intone it,
But rhymes of Robin Hood, or Randolph of Chester ;

Of our Lady or Lord, not the least ever made !
 Forty vows have I made, and forgot them the morrow ;
 I performed never penance as the priest appointed ; 405
 Right sorry for my sins as yet was I never
 If I bid any beads, but it be in my wrath,
 What I tell with my tongue is two miles from my heart.
 Each day am I occupied, holidays and others, 409
 With idle tales at ale-house, and sometimes in churches ;
 God's pain and His passion I ponder on seldom.

I visit no feeble men, or fettered men in jails ;
 I'd sooner hear ribaldry, or summer-games of cobblers,
 Or lying tales to laugh at, and belie my neighbours, 414
 Than all that e'er Mark wrote, John, Matthew, or Luke.
 All vigils and fastdays I simply let slide,
 And lie abed in Lent, in a lazy sleep,
 Till past matins and mass ; then I move to the friars ;
 To come to the mass-end, for me, is enough.
 I seldom am shriven, save sickness impel me, 420
 Not twice in two years ; when I shrive me by guess !
 I've been parson and priest past thirty long years,
 Yet I sing not, nor *sol-fa*, nor Saints' Lives read ;
 I can find in a field or a furlong a hare
 Better than in *beatus-vir* or in *beati-omnes* 425
 (Ps. i. or Ps. cxxviii.)

Construe a clause, or full clearly expound it.

I can hold well 'lovedays,' or hear a reeve's reckoning,
But in canon-law and decretals can read not a line.

If I buy aught and pledge it—but it be on the tally—
I forget it right soon ; and, when settlement's sought, 430
Six times or seven I forswear it with oaths ;
Thus true men I trouble ten hundred of times.

My servingmen's salary is sometimes behind ;
Rueful is the reckoning, to read the accounts ;
With wrath and ill-will all my workmen I pay. 435

If a service is shown me, or succour at need,
I requite it unkindly ; I cannot conceive it ;
For I have, and have had, the ways of a hawk,
Being lured, not by love, but by meat in the hand.

The favours my fellows once fondly accorded, 440
I, Sloth, have forgotten them sixty times since ;
In speech, or in sparing speech, spoilt many times
Both flesh-meat and fishes, and many such victuals :
Both bread and eke ale, milk, butter, and cheese, 444
Would I waste in my service, till none would they serve.

I ran wild in youth, still refusing to learn,

And since, for my sloth, as a beggar subsisted.
How barren, alas ! was the life of my youth !”

“ Dost repent ?” quoth Repentance ; and straightway he swooned ;

Vigilate, the watchful, drew water from his eyes 450
Which he flung in his face, and with firmness of speech
Said, “ Beware of Despair, that will work thee but woe ;
‘ I am sorry for my sins,’ thus say to thyself,
And beat on thy breast, and beseech God’s grace ;
No guilt is so great but His goodness is more.” 455

Then sat Sloth up, made the sign of the cross,
And vowed, before God, for his foul neglect :—
“ Each Sunday, for seven years, except I am sick,
Will I draw me, ere day, to the dear-lov’d church,
To hear matins and mass, like a monk devout. 460
No ale after meat shall hold me thence
Till I’ve evensong heard ; so help me the Rood !
Of wealth will I strip me, and strive to restore
What I wickedly won by my cunning wits.
Though I lack good living, no labour I’ll spare 465
Till each have his own, ere I hence depart ;
And with help of the remnant, by the rood of Chester,
Will I seek Saint Truth, ere I see far Rome ! ”

Robert the robber was fain to restore ;
 But wealth had he none, wherefore sorely he wept. 470
 The sorrowing sinner thus said to himself :—
 “ Christ, that on Calvary didst die on the cross,
 When Dismas my brother besought Thee for grace,
 And had mercy on the man who ‘ Remember me ’ said,
 (Luke xxiii. 42)
 Have ruth on the robber that naught can restore, 475
 Nor ween to win wealth with skill of my own.
 Mitigation I pray for ; Thy mercy is great,
 Nor condemn me at doomsday for deeds I did ill.”

What befell of this felon I failed to discern ;
 With both his eyes water, I wot well, he wept, 480
 And acknowledged moreover his crimes unto Christ
 Till Penitence, his pike-staff, was polished anew,
 To leap with, o’er land, while his life should endure . . .

Then Repentance had ruth, and advised them to kneel :—
 “ For sinners I pray to our Saviour for grace 486
 To amend our misdeeds, and show mercy to all.
 Now, God ! that in goodness the great world didst make,
 Of naught madest all, and man most like Thyself,
 And didst suffer him to sin, which was sickness to all, 490
 Yet all for the best, as the book hath expressed :—

Oh happy fault ! Oh necessary sin of Adam !

Thy Son, through that sin, was sent to this earth,
Made man of a maid, mankind for to save ;

Like Thyself and Thy Son we sinners were made ;

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Gen. i. 26).

He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him
(1 John iv. 16).

And since, in Thy Son, in our suit didst die 495

On Good Friday, for man's sake, at full time of day ;

Nor Thyself, nor Thy Son, didst feel sorrow in death,

In our suit was the sorrow ; Thy Son led it captive :—

He led captivity captive (Ps. lxxviii. 18).

The sun then, for sorrow, lost sight for a time ;

At midday, when's most light, the mealtime of saints, 500

Thou fed'st, with Thy fresh blood, our forefathers in dark-
ness ;—

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light
(Isa. ix. 2).

By the light that then leapt out was Lucifer blinded ;

It blew all Thy blessèd to Paradise' bliss.

The third day thereafter saw Thee in our suit ;

Frail Mary beheld Thee ere Mary Thy mother ; 505

To solace all sinners Thou sufferedst thus :—

I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance

(Matt. ix. 13).

All that Mark ever made, John, Matthew, and Luke—
Thy doughtiest deeds—were done in our armour :—

The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John i. 14)

By so much, me seemeth, more surely may we
Both pray and beseech, if it be Thy will, 510
Our Father and Brother, Thy mercy be shown us ;
Have ruth on these ribalds, repenting them sorely
They wrought Thee to wrath, in word, thought, or deed.”

Then Hope seized a horn, *Thou-shalt-quicken-us-again*

(Ps. lxxi. 20),

And blew it with *blessed-is-he-whose-sin-is-forgiven*

(Ps. xxxii. 1), 515

Till saints high in heaven all sang in accord :—

*O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast; how excellent is
Thy loving-kindness* (Ps. xxxvi. 6).

A thousand of men then came thronging together,
Crying upward to Christ and His kindly mother
That grace might go with them, to seek saint Truth.

No wight was so wise that the way there he knew ; 520
They blundered, like beasts, over banks and o'er hills,
A long while, till late, when a lithe one they met,

Apparelled as a pagan, in pilgrim's guise.
He bare him a staff, with a broad strip bound,
That round it was twined like a woodbine's twist ; 525
A bowl and a bag he bare by his side ;
A hundred of vials were set on his hat,
Signs from Sinai, Gallician shells ;
With crosses on his cloak, and the keys of Rome,
And the vernicle before, for that men should discern 530
And see by his signs what shrines he had sought.

Then fain would this folk know from whence he had come ?
" From Sinai," he said, " and the Sepulchre Holy,
Bethlehem and Babylon, I've been in them both,
Armenia, Alexandria, and other like places. 535
Ye may see by the signs that here sit on my hat
I have walkèd full widely, in wet and in dry,
And sought out good saints, for the health of my soul."
" Know'st thou a saint men entitle Saint Truth ?
Canst thou walk in the way now, to where He resides ?" 540

" Nay," said the good man, " so God be my guide,
I saw never palmer with pikestaff or scrip
That asked for Him ever, ere now in this place ! "

" By Peter ! " quoth A PLOUGHMAN, and put forth his head,

“ I know him as closely as clerk doth his books ! 545
Through Conscience and Kind-wit I ken where He dwelleth ;
They safely ensured me to serve Him for ever,
Both to sow and to set, while my strength shall endure.
I have faithfully followed him fifty long years,
Both sown Him His seed, and His cattle preserved ; 550
Within and without have I watched o’er His profit.
I dike and I delve, and do that He biddeth ;
Sometimes I sow, and sometimes I thrash ;
I am tailor or tinker, as Truth doth appoint ;
I weave or I wind, doing what so He biddeth. 555

Though I say it myself, my service He values ;
I have meed in good measure, and sometimes have more ;
None prompter to pay can a poor man find,
He withholds none his hire ; he hath it at even.
He’s lowly as a lamb, and loving in speech ; 560
And would ye now wit well, where that He dwelleth,
Full well can I wend on my way to His place.”

“ Yea, Piers ! ” quoth the pilgrims, and proffered him hire
To teach them the true way to Truth’s own abode. 564

“ Bymysoul’s health, ” quoth Piers, and was fain for to swear,
“ Not a farthing I finger, for Saint Thomas’s shrine !
Truth would love me the less for a long time after.

But would ye now wend there, the way there is this
That I set now before you ; I say you the sooth.—
Commence it through Meekness, ye men and ye women, 570
Till ye come unto Conscience, let Christ know the truth
How ye love well our Lord as the liefest of things,
And your neighbour the next, and in no wise requite him
Otherwise than thou wouldst he should do to thyself.
Bend forth by a brook named Be-courtly-of-speech, 575
Till ye find there a ford, called Honour-your-fathers :—

Honour thy father and thy mother (Exod. xx. 12) :
Wade through that water, and wash you well there ;
Ye shall leap then the lightlier, your lifetime after !
Then see shall ye Swear-not-except-ye-have-need-
And-name-not-in-vain-the-great-name-of-the-Lord. 580

Next come near a croft, but ne'er come ye therein ;
That croft is called Covet-not-men's-cattle-or-wives-
And-none-of-their-servants-that-might-them-annoy ;
So break ye no boughs there, save boughs of your own.
Two stocks there are standing, but stay ye not there, 585
Named Steal-not and Slay-not, but slip by them both,
Leave them on the left hand, and look not upon them ;
And Hold-well-thy-holiday-holy-till-even.
Next bend past a barrow, Bear-no-false-witness,
'Tis fenced in with florins and other like fees ; 590

Then pluck thou no plant there, for peril of thy soul.
 Then see shall ye Say-Sooth-as-sooth-is-indeed-
 And-otherwise-never-at-no-one's-request.
 Next come to a court, as clear as the sun,
 Its moat is of Mercy, the manor around, 595
 The walls are of Wit, to guard against Will,
 Embattled with Christendom, Christians to save,
 Buttressed with Believe-so-or-savèd-be-never.
 The house is all covered, both chambers and halls, 599
 Not with lead, but with Love, and Low-speech-of-brethren;
 The bridge is of Pray-well-the-better-to-speed ;
 Each pillar, of Penance or Prayers-to-the-Saints,
 And of Almsdeeds, the hooks whereon hung are the gates.

Grace is the gate-ward, a good man forsooth ;
 His man is Amend-you, full many men know him. 605
 Tell him this token, which Truth will approve,
 ' I performed all the penance the priest did enjoin,
 And am sorry for my sins, and so shall be ever
 When thoughts of them throng me, yea, though I were pope !
 Pray Amend-you full meekly his Master to ask 610
 To throw wide the wicket the woman once shut
 When Adam and Eve ate their apples unroasted :—

*Through Eve was it closed to all, and through the Virgin
 Mary was it opened again.*

For His is the key, though the king should slumber.
 If Grace shall once grant thee to go through the gate,
 Thou shalt see, in thyself, Truth sit in thine heart, 615
 In a chain of Charity, a child as thou wert,
 To suffer but say naught 'gainst will of thy sire.
 Beware then of Wrath-thee, most wicked of all,
 He hath envy of Him that should sit in thine heart,
 And putteth forth Pride and the Praise-of-thyself; 620
 Thy boasting of benefits maketh thee blind,
 Till out thou art driven, and the door shut fast,
 And closed with a key, to keep thee outside
 A hundred years, haply, ere ever thou enter.
 Thus thou lovest His love, by uplifting thyself, 625
 Ne'er, haply, to enter, save only by grace.

There are seven sweet sisters that serve Truth for ever,
 Porters of posterns assigned to that place.
 Abstinence is one, and Humility next,
 Charity and Chastity, chief of His maidens, 630
 Patience and Peace, many people they help;
 And Largesse, the lady that lets many in;
 From the pinfold of hell she hath helped out a thousand.
 He that kinship can claim with these sisters seven
 Is wondrously welcome, and well is receivèd. 635
 And except ye're akin to some one of the seven.

'Tis full hard, by my head, for any of you all
To go through the gate there, save grace may be yours."

"By Christ!" quoth a cutpurse, "no kin have I there!"
"Nor I," quoth an apeward, "for aught that I know." 640
"Wist I," quoth a wafer-man, "such were the truth,
No further I'd foot it, by friars' advice!"

"Yes!" quoth Piers Plowman, (their profit he sought,)
"Mercy's a maid there, hath might over all,
Akin to all sinners, as her Son is also; 645
By help of these two (there is hope in none other)
Grace shalt thou get there, by going betimes."

"By Saint Paul," quoth a pardoner, "perhaps I'm unknown there,
Where's my brief-box, my bull, and my bishop's letters?"

A common wench cried—"Thy companion I'll be, 650
And say I'm thy sister; but see! they are gone!"

PASSUS VI.

THE PLOUGHMAN AND HUNGER.

“ **A** WILD way were this, save a guide were at hand,
To follow us each foot ;” so the folks complained.
Quoth Perkin the ploughman—“ By Saint Peter of Rome,
I must plough my half-acre, beside the highway ;
Had I plough’d my half-acre, and sown it well after, 5
I would wend with you people, and show you the way.”

“ ’Twould let us too long,” quoth a lady in a veil,
“ What should we women then work at the while ? ”

“ Some, sew up the sacks, against shedding the wheat ;
Ye, ladies so lovely, so long in the fingers, 10
Get sendal and silk ; and sew, at your leisure,
Chasubles for chaplains, our churches to honour.

Ye wives and ye widows, spin wool or spin flax ;
Make cloth as I counsel, and teach so your daughters.
The needy and naked, take note of their tatters, 15
And cast them some clothes, as Truth hath commanded.

I shall find them some livelihood, unless the land fail,
Both meat and good bread, both for rich and for poor,
As long as I live, for the love of our Lord.

All manner of men, that meat earn and drink, 20
Help them to work well, that win you your food."

"'Tis true !" quoth a knight then, "he teaches us best ;
But truly, this knowledge was taught to me never ;
Now teach me, and trust me to try to do well."

"By Paul, now," quoth Perkin, "ye proffer so fair, 25
I will sweat in thy service, and sow for us both,
For thy love will I labour, while life shall endure,
In covenant that thou keep holy kirk and myself
From wasters and wantons, this world that destroy.
Go, hardily hunt both the hares and the foxes, 30
The boars and the brocks, that would break down my hedges ;
Go, fling up thy falcons the wild fowl to kill,
For they come to my croft, and would crop off my wheat."

Courteously the knight then commenced to reply,
"As my power is, Piers, here I plight thee my troth 35

To fulfil this fair offer, though fighting ensue ;
 As long as I live will I lend thee mine aid."

"One point yet," quoth Piers, "I would pray you to grant !
 O'ertax thou no tenant, save Truth will assent !
 And though thou amerce them, let Mercy be taxer ! 40
 Be Meekness thy master, let Meed go unheeded ;
 Though poor men should proffer thee presents and gifts,
 Decline them, in case that thy claim be denied ;
 Lest thou yield them again, at the year's full end,
 In a perilous place, that is Purgat'ry named ! 45
 Beguile not thy bondman, the better thou'lt speed ;
 Though under thee here, it may happen in heaven
 His seat may be higher, in saintlier bliss,
 Than thine, save thou labour to live as thou shouldst ;
 Friend, go up higher (Luke xiv. 10).
 In the charnel at church, churls are hard to discern, 50
 Or a knight from a knave there ; this know in thy heart.
 And be true of thy tongue ; all tales shalt thou hate
 Save of wisdom or wit, that may workmen reprove.
 Hold with no ribalds, nor hear thou their tales,
 And mostly at meat such men shalt thou shun ; 55
 They're the devil's own tell-tales, I do thee to know."

"I assent, by Saint James," said the knight in reply ;
 "I will work by thy words, while my life shall endure."

"I'll apparel me," quoth Piers, "in a pilgrim's guise,
 And wend with you will I, till Truth we may find. 60
 I'll cast on my clothes, be they cobbled or whole,
 My gaiters and cuffs, lest cold be my nails;
 A basket, behind me, shall be for a scrip;
 A bushel of bread-corn I'll bring me therein;
 I'll sow it myself, and right soon will I wend 65
 On pilgrimage, like palmers, a pardon to gain.
 Whoso helps me to plough here, or sow, ere I wend,
 Shall gain him a good right to glean here in harvest,
 Therewith to make merry, though many begrudge him.
 And craftsmen of all kinds, whose callings are true, 70
 I will find them in food while they faithfully live;
 Save Jackie the juggler, and Janet the frail,
 Daniel the dicer, and Denot the bawd,
 The friar that feigneth, and folks of his order,
 And Robin the ribald, for his rustic words. 75
 For Truth hath me told, and bade tell it again—
 'Let their names be deleted, and deal with them never;
 No tithes should be taken from traitors like these.'

*Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; and not
 be written with the righteous (Ps. lxxix. 28).*

By good luck, they live yet! May God them amend!"

Dame Work-when-time-is Piers' wife was surnamed; 80

His daughter, Do-so-or-thy-dame-shall-thee beat ;
His son, Suffer-sov'reigns-to-have-all-their-will-
If-thou-darest-to-judge-them-thou'lt-dearly-abide-it.

“ May God be with all, with His word for our guide !
Now I'm hoary and old, having goods of my own, 85
To penance and pilgrimage I'll pass with the others ;
And I wish, ere I wend, now to write out my will.
' In God's name, amen ! lo ! I make it myself.
May God have my soul, who hath saved and deserved it,
And defend it from fiends, for so I believe, 90
Till I come to account, as the creed me instructs,
For release and remission of rental, I hope.

Let the kirk have my carrion, and keep well my bones,
For of corn and of cattle she cravèd the tithe.
I paid it her promptly, for peril of my soul ; 95
She is holden, I hope, to have me in her masses,
And in memory mind me, amongst her believers.

My wife shall have only what fairly I won,
To deal 'mong my daughters and dear little boys.'
Though I die should to day, of all debts am I quit ; 100
I bare back what I borrowed, ere going to bed.

With the rest and the remnant, by the rood of Lucca !

I will worship therewith Saint Truth, while I live,
And at plough be His pilgrim, for poor men's sakes.
My plough-foot, for pikestaff, shall pick up the roots, 105
While my coulter shall carve through and cleanse out the
furrows."

Now Piers and his pilgrims to the plough are gone;
To plough his half-acre there helped him full many;
Dikers and delvers, they digged up the balks,
And Perkin was pleased then, and praised them at work. 110
Other workmen there were too, that eagerly worked;
Each man, in his manner, well made his attempt;
And some, to please Perkin, would pick up the weeds.

Then Piers, at high prime, the plough he let stand,
To o'ersee them himself; and whoso best wrought 115
Should be hired thereafter, when harvest-time came.

Some sat down at ease, and sung in the ale-house,
Their help in the ploughing was—"hi! tooral, lay!"
"On peril of my soul!" quoth Piers in his anger,
"Except ye rise quickly, and run to your work, 120
Not a grain that here groweth shall gladden your need;
Though ye die of spare diet, who careth a doit?"

Then false men were frightened, and feigned they were blind.

Some laid up their legs, as such liars know how,
And bemoaned them to Piers, and prayed for his grace :—125
“ Our limbs cannot labour, so willeth the Lord !
We pray for thee, Piers, and thy ploughshare as well,
That God, of His grace, may your grain increase,
And repay you what pittance for us ye provide ;
Exertion would slay us, such sickness us aileth ! ” 130

“ If ye say sooth,” said Piers, “ I soon shall espy !
Ye are wasters, I wot well, and Truth wot the sooth !
As His servant, full surely I seek Him to warn
What wights in this world here His workmen annoy.
Ye waste what men win with hard travail and work ; 135
But Truth soon shall teach you His teams how to drive,
Or your bread shall be barley, your drink of the brook !
The blind and the bedrid, or broken of limb,
Their bread shall be wheat-bread, their drink shall be mine,
Till God, of His goodness, amendment may send. 140
Ye must travail as Truth wills, and take meat and hire,
Keeping kine in the field, or the cattle from corn ;
Ye must dike or must delve, or must thrash out the sheaves,
Or help to make mortar, or bear muck a-field.
In lechery and laziness live ye, and sloth, 145
And all through God’s suff’rance, that spares you from pain !

But hermits and anchorites, who eat but at noon,

And no more till the morrow, mine alms shall they have ;
My chattels are theirs, that have cloisters and churches.
But runagate Robert shall naught have of mine, 150
Nor preachers, save such as the bishop empowers ;
They shall bread have and broth, and abide at their ease,
For religion, in reason, hath somewhat for certain."

Then a waster waxed wroth, and was willing to fight ;
And to Perkin the ploughman he proffered his glove ; 155
A Breton, a braggart, next boasted to Piers,
Bade him pack with his plough, for a peevish rogue !
" Will ye or nill ye, we'll have what we want,
Thy flour and thy flesh-meat we'll fetch when we please,
And make ourselves merry, though much ye resist ! " 160

Then Perkin the ploughman complained to the knight,
To keep him, by covenant, from cursèd deceivers,
And from wasters like wolves, that make the world dear :—
" They waste and they win not, and ne'er, the mean while,
Will people have plenty—my plough lying idle." 165

Kindly the knight then, in courteous wise,
Warned well the waster, and wooed him to profit—
" Or abide by the law, by the order I bear ! "
" I was ne'er wont to work, and I will not begin : "—

He made light of the law, and still less of the knight, 170
Setting Piers and his plough at a peashell's price,
And menaced his men, whensoever they met.
“Now, on peril of my soul, I shall punish you all!”—
Piers whooped after Hunger, who heard him at once,
“Wreak woe on these wasters, the world who destroy!” 175

Then Hunger caught Waster in haste by the maw,
And wrung so his belly, that both his eyes watered ;
That Breton he buffeted on both cheeks about,
That he looked like a lantern his lifetime thereafter !
He beat so their bodies, he burst half their ribs. 180
Had not Piers, with a pease-loaf, prayed Hunger to cease,
They soon had been buried, believe thou naught else !
“Let them live with the hogs, let them eat what they leave,
Or broad beans and bran, that are baked well together,
Or milk and some mild ale”—thus Piers for them prayed.
Then false men, for fear, fled fast to the barns, 186
And flapped on with flails, from morning till eve,
Till Hunger less hardy was on them to gaze,
For a potful of peasen that Piers had got ready.
A heap too of hermits caught hold of their spades, 190
And curtailed their copes, and so made them short-coated,
And went forth as workmen with shovels and spades,
Still diking and delving, to drive away Hunger.

The bedrid and blind then were bettered by thousands;
Who sat to beg silver, full soon were they healed. 195
Bread baked for bay horses was help to the hungry,
And beggars would bend to their labour for beans;
Each poor man was pleased to have pease for his hire,
To what Piers prayed them do, they were prompt as a hawk.
Thereof was Piers proud, and soon put them to work, 200
Giving meat as he might, and a moderate hire.

Then pity had Piers, praying Hunger to go
Fast home to his own place, and hold him content—
“Of wasters, through thee, am I well now avenged. 204
But I pray, ere thou pass hence,” quoth Piers to Sir Hunger,
“With mendicant beggars what’s best to be done?
For I wot, when thou wendest, they’ll work with ill will;
'Tis misfortune that makes them so meek to obey,
For default of their food is this folk at my will.
They’re my brethren by blood, God bought us alike; 210
Truth taught me betimes to love all mankind,
And help them in all things, as each should have need.
And now would I wit of thee, what were the best,
How may I them master, and make them to work?”
“Hear now,” quoth Hunger, “and hold it as wisdom;
Bold beggars and big, that their bread well may earn, 216
With hounds’ bread and horse-bread hold up their hearts;

Abate them with beans, lest their bellies grow fat ;
If the grumblers demur, bid them go to their work ;
They'll sup all the sweeter, when supper is earned. 220

If thou find any feeble, by Fortune oppressed,
Or defrauded by false men, then find out their needs,
Comfort and keep them, for Christ's sake in heaven ;
Love them and lend, as the law of God teacheth :

Bear ye one another's burdens (Gal. vi. 2).

All manner of men, that thou mightest espy, 225
That are needy and naught have, such help with thy goods ;
Love them, not loathe them, leave vengeance to God ;
And though they do ill, 'tis not thine to chastise :—

Vengeance is mine ; I will repay (Rom. xii. 19).

God's grace wouldst thou gain, be the gospel thy guide,
Be loved by the low folk, so look for His grace :— 230

*Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteous-
ness* (Luke xvi. 9)."

"I ne'er would grieve God, for the wealth of the world,
May I do so and sin not ?" said Piers in reply.

"So be it," said Hunger, "the Bible is witness ;
Lo, Genesis the giant, engend'rer of all :—

'In sweat and in sorrow thy meat shalt thou earn, 235

And for livelihood labour,' our Lord so ordained.
Saith Sapience the same, as I saw in the Bible ;
' The sluggard in snow-time forsaketh the plough,
Let him beg then in harvest, and none help his hunger '
(Prov. xx. 4).

Matthew ' with-the-man's-face ' a parable made, 240
How the man with the talent to traffic refused,
And his master dismissed him, with blame evermore ;
His talent he took, since toil would he never,
And transferred it to him who the ten talents had,
And proclaimed in the hearing of all holy church, 245
' He that hath, still shall have, for help in his need ;
He that naught hath, shall naught have, and none shall him help
What he weeneth to have, I will also withdraw ' (Matt.
xxv. 24-29).

E'en Common-sense wills that each wight ought to work
In ditching or delving, or travailing in prayer ; 250
Contemplative or active life Christ hath ordained.
Saith the psalter in the psalm of *beati-omnes*,
' He that feedeth himself with his faithful labour
Is blessèd,' the Book saith, ' in body and in soul.'

*For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands ; happy shalt
thou be.*" (Ps. cxxviii. 2.)

" Yet I pray thee," quoth Piers, " for love, if ye know

Any lesson of leechcraft, I pray, let me learn. 256
For some of my servants, and myself also,
A whole week we work not ; our stomachs so ache ! ”

“ I wot well,” quoth Hunger, “ what sickness you aileth ;
Ye have munched overmuch, and that maketh you groan.
But I bid thee,” quoth Hunger, “ if health thou wouldst gain,
That thou drink not each day, ere thou partly hast dined.
Eat not, I bid thee, ere hunger thee taketh,
And sends thee his sauce, to give savour to meat.
And keep some till supper, and sit not too long ; 265
Arise up ere appetite has eaten his fill.
Let not Sir Surfeit once sit at thy board ;
Nor deal as he deemeth ; he’s dainty of tongue,
Of many strange meats his maw is an-hungered.

If thou diet thee thus, I dare lay mine ears, 270
That Physic his furred hoods will sell for his food,
And his cloak of choice fur, with its buttons of gold,
And be fain, by my faith ! his physic to leave,
And learn lab’ring on land ; for livelihood’s sweet.
Many leeches are murd’ers ! The Lord them amend ! 275
Men die, through their drinks, ere destiny claims them.”

“ By Saint Paul ! ” quoth Piers, “ these are profitable words.

Wend, Hunger, when thou wilt, well be thee for ever !
For thy laudable lesson the Lord thee requite ! ” 279

“ Hark now, ” quoth Hunger, “ ne’er hence will I wend
Ere to-day I have dined, and have drunk well also. ”

“ I’ve no penny, ” quoth Piers, “ young pullets to buy,
Nor bacon nor geese, only two green cheeses, 284
Some curds and some cream, and an oaten cake,
Two bean-loaves with bran, just baked for my children.
And I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon,
Nor eggs, by my Christendom, collops to make ;
Only onions and parsley, and cabbage-like plants ;
Eke a cow and a calf, and an old cart-mare
To draw afield dung, while the drought shall prevail. 290
By such food must we live, until Lammas-time come,
I hope I may have then some harvest afield ;
And I’ll dight thee a dinner, as dearly will please me. ”
Then all the poor people their pea-shells brought,
Beans and baked apples they brought in their laps, 295
Young onions and chervils and ripe cherries many,
And proffered these presents, Sir Hunger to please.

All Hunger ate hastily, and asked for some more !
Then poor folk, for fear, fed Hunger with speed,

And thought him to poison with peas and green leeks. 300
Then harvest drew nigh, new corn came to market,
And folks were full fain, and fed Hunger right well
With good ale, as a glutton, and got him to sleep.

Then would Waster not work, but would wander about,
Nor beggar eat bread wherein beans had a part, 305
But flour of the finest, and wheat of the whitest ;
Nor halfpenny-ale would in any wise drink,
But the best and the brownest the borough could sell.

Then labourers landless, that lived by their hands,
Would deign not to dine upon worts a day old ; 310
No penny-ale pleased them, no piece of good bacon,
Only fresh flesh or fish, well fried or well baked,
Ever hot and still hotter, to heat well their maw.

He must highly be hired, or else will he chide,
Bewailing his woe, as a workman to live. 315
'Gainst the counsel of Cato he loudly complains—

'Let poverty's burden be patiently borne.'

He grumbles 'gainst God, and grieves without reason,
And curses the king, and his counsel after,
Who license the laws that the labourers grieve.
While Hunger was master, no man would complain, 320

Nor strive 'gainst the statute ; so sternly he looked.

I warn you, ye workmen, to win while ye may ;
For Hunger now hitherward hastens full fast,
To wake you with water, and wasters to starve.
Ere five years be fulfilled, such a famine shall rise, 325
Through floods and foul weather the fruits shall all fail ;
So Saturn hath said, and hath sent you to warn.—

When the sun seems amiss, and ye see two monks' heads,
And a maid have the mast'ry, and multiply by eight,
Then Death shall withdraw him, but Dearth shall be justice,
And Davy the ditcher shall die yet of hunger, 331
Save God, of His goodness, will grant us a truce.

PASSUS VII.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S PARDON.

TRUTH heard tell hereof, and to Piers He sent,
To take him his team, and to till well the earth ;
And procured him a pardon 'from pain and from guilt,'
For him and his heirs, for evermore after.
He bade hold him at home, and his horse-plough employ ; 5
All that helped him to plough, and to set, and to sow,
Or in any employment that Piers might assist,
Like pardon with Piers hath Truth to them granted.

Kings too and knights, such as keep holy church,
And rightly in realms ever rule o'er the people, 10
Have pardon through purgat'ry to pass with much ease,
With patriarchs and prophets, in Paradise, fellows.

And bishops so blest, if they be, as they should,
Legists of both laws, to laymen to preach,
Who, as much as they may, all sinners amend, 15
Are peers with th' apostles—such pardon Piers showed—
At the high day of doom on the daïs to sit.

Merchants i' th' margin had many long years,
But 'from pain and from guilt' would the Pope none grant;
For they keep not their holidays, as holy church teacheth, 20
And they swear 'by their soul,' and 'so God be their help,'
Clear against conscience, their chattels to sell.

But under secret seal Truth sent them a letter,
Full boldly to buy what best they could choose,
And sell it soon after and save well the profit, 25
Therewith to build hospitals, helping the sick,
Or roads that are rotten full rightly repair,
Or bridges, when broken, to build up anew,
Well marry poor maidens, or make of them nuns,
Poor people and pris'ners with food to provide, 30
Set scholars to school, or to some other crafts,
And relieve the religious, enhancing their rents ;—
"I will send you Myself then Saint Michael Mine angel,
Lest fiends should assault you, or fright you when dying,
To help you from hopeless despair, and to send 35

In safety your souls to My saints in their bliss.'”

Then merchants were merry, wept many for joy,
And praised Piers the Ploughman, who purchased this bull.
Least pardon had lawyers, who pleaded for meed ;
The psalter saves none such as seek after bribes 40
From innocents even, no evil that know :—

He that taketh not reward against the innocent (Ps. xv. 5).
If pleaders took pains but to plead for the feeble,
Princes and prelates should pay for their trouble :—

From kings and from princes shall come their reward.
Many justices and jurors for Jack will do more
Than for love of the Lord—believe this is true. 45

He that spendeth his speech, and speaks for the poor
That's needy and innocent, and no one hath harmed,
Comforts his case, nor covets great gifts,
Showing law for our Lord's love, e'en such as he learnt,
No devil at 's deathday shall dare him to fright, 50
But his soul shall be safe, as the psalter bears witness :—

Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? (Ps. xv. 1).
Water and wind, wit, and fire are free ;
These four did our Father make common to all,
And these are Truth's treasures, true people to help,
Ne'er waxing nor waning, but like God Himself. 55
When they draw near to death, and indulgences seek,

Their pardon is poor, at their parting hence,
Who meed from poor people for pleading demand.
Ye legists and lawyers, believe in the truth ;
The mark if I miss, then is Matthew to blame, 60
Who bade me to mark, and this maxim me told :—
*All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you,
do ye even so to them (Matt. vii. 12).*

All living lab'ers, that live by their hands,
Who truly receive and as truly perform,
Who in love live, and law, for their lowly hearts
Have the same absolution that sent was to Piers. 65

But mendicant beggars are not in the bull,
Save the cause that inclines them to begging be true.
He that begs or beseeches, save bitter his need,
Is as false as the fiend, and defraudeth the needy,
Beguiling the giver against what he would. 70
If he knew he'd no need, he would give to another
More needy than he, and the neediest help.
Thus counsels us Cato, and 'the clerk of the stories' :—
Cui des, videto, is Cato's own teaching ;
And 'the stories' instruct us how alms to bestow :— 75
*Let thine alms remain in thine own hand, whilst thou
considerest to whom to give.*

But Gregory, good man, bade give unto all
That ask, for His love's sake, that lent to us all things:—

*Choose not whom to pity, lest thou pass him by who is
worthy to receive ; for thou knowest not through whom
thou mayest most please God.*

Ye know not who's worthy, but God knows his need ;
The receiver's the traitor, if treason there be.

He that giveth, imparts, and prepares for his rest ; 80
He that beggeth but borrows, and brings him in debt.

For beggars still borrow, with God for their surety,
Who repayeth the gift, giving usury also:—

*Wherefore gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at
my coming I might have required mine own with
usury ? (Luke xix. 23).*

Then beg not, ye beggars, save great be your need ;

He that buyeth his bread, as the book beareth witness, 85
Enough hath, that bread hath, though naught he have else:—

He is rich enough, who lacks not bread.

Learn rest and contentment by reading Saints' Lives.

The Bible bans beggars, and blames them e'en thus:—

*I have been young, and now am old ; yet have I not seen
the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread (Ps.
xxxvii. 25).*

Ye live in no love, and no law observe ;

Full often ye wed not the women ye deal with ; . . . 90
They bring forth bairns that are bastards accounted ;
His back or his bone if one breaks in his youth,
Ye go forth to beg with that bairn ever after.
More people misshapen are seen among beggars 95
Than among all the many that move o'er the earth.
They that live such a life may the moment long loathe
Of birth, when the time comes that takes them away.

But old men and hoary, and helpless of strength,
And women with child, that to work are unable, 100
Bedrid and blind men, or broken in limb,
That pain bear in patience, like lepers or others,
Have as plenary pardon as Piers hath himself ;
For love of their low hearts our Lord hath them granted
Their penance and purgat'ry here upon earth. 105

“ Piers ! ” quoth a priest then, “ thy pardon I'd read ;
And construe each clause, and declare it in English.”

Then Piers, at his prayer, the pardon unfolded,
And behind both the twain I beheld all the bull.
In two lines it lay, and ne'er a leaf more, 110
And was written right thus, as was witnessed by Truth :—
They that have done good, shall go into life everlasting :
And they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

“By Saint Peter!” the priest said, “no pardon I find
Save ‘Do-well and have-well, and God have thy soul,’
And ‘Do-ill and have-ill, and hope nothing else
But, after thy death-day, the devil have thy soul.’” 115

And Piers, for pure anger, then pulled it in twain,

And said:—“*Though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with
me* (Ps. xxiii. 4).

I shall cease from my sowing, and toil not so hard,

And for needs of the body be busy no more!

With prayers and with penance I plough will hereafter,

And weep in my sleep-time, though wheat-bread should fail.

The prophet his bread ate in penance and sorrow, 121

As the psalter hath said, and so did many others;

They that loyally love God can live upon little:—

My tears have been my meat day and night (Ps. xlii. 3).

Unless that Luke lie, we may learn from the birds,

We should ne’er be too busy about worldly bliss; 125

Ne solliciti sitis, he saith in the gospel (Luke xii. 22),

And shows us examples, ourselves to instruct:—

Who finds food in winter for fowls of the field?

They’ve no garner to go to, but God finds it all.”

“What?” the priest said to Piers, “by Saint Peter,
me thinketh, 130

Thou'rt lettered a little ; who taught thee thy book ? ”

“ Abstinence the abbess my A-b-c taught me,
And Conscience came after, and counselled me more.”

“ Wert thou priest,” quoth he, “ Piers ! thou might'st
preach when thou wouldst,
As divinity-doctor, on *dixit insipiens !* ” (Ps. xiv. 1). 135

“ Rude wretch ! ” replied Piers, “ little read'st thou the Bible,
For Solomon's saws thou hast seldom regarded :—
Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out. ” (Prov.
xxii. 10.)

The priest then and Perkin opposed one another ;
Through their words I awoke, looking warily round,
And the sun in the south saw I sitting that time ; 140
Meatless and moneyless, on Malvern hills,
Did I ponder this dream while departing for home.
Full often this dream hath induced me to study
Whate'er I saw sleeping, if so it might be :—
For Perkin the ploughman full pensive in heart ; 145
What a pardon had Piers, all to comfort the people ;
How the priest had impugned it with two special words.

But I love not expounding ; experience fails.
Cato and canonists counsel us never
To seek exposition :—*ne somnia cures.*

150

And yet the book Bible bears witness to all men,
How Daniel divinèd the dreams of a king
That Nebuchadnezzar is namèd of clerks.
Said Daniel, “sir king, thy dream doth betoken
That strangers shall come here thy kingdom to cleave ; 155
Amongst lower lords shall thy lands be divided.”
As Daniel decided, indeed it befell,
The king lost his lordship, which lower men took.
And Joseph dreamt marvels ; the moon and the sun,
And eleven bright stars all stooped in obeisance ; 160
And Jacob thus judged as to Joseph’s dream.
“Dear son,” quoth his father, “we must, for default,
Myself and my sons, sometime seek thee for food.”
It befell as his father said ; Pharaoh was king,
And Joseph was justice all Egypt to judge. 165
It befell so, his father and friends there him sought.
All this doth induce me to dwell on my dreams,
And how the priest provèd no pardon like Do-well,
Deciding that Do-well indulgences passed,
Biennials, triennials, and letters of bishops ; 170

Thus Do-well at doomsday is dearly received,
Surpassing the pardon of Peter's own church.

The pope, by his power, can pardon the people ;
Without any penance they pass into heaven ;
And so I believe, e'en as lettered men tell us :— 175

Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven

(Matt. xvi. 19).

So I likewise believe—the Lord forbid else!—
That pardon and penance and prayers can save
Souls that have sinnèd, yea, seven times deadly !
But to trust to triennials, truly me thinketh,
Is less safe for the soul, for certain, than Do-well ! 180

Then know ye, ye nobles, ye rich ones on earth,
Having trust in your treasure, triennials to buy,
Be never the bolder to break the ten hests ;
And least should ye masters, ye mayors and ye judges,
That have wealth in the world, and as wise men are holden,
Purchase you pardons, or bulls from the pope. 186
At the dreadful doom, when the dead shall arise,
And come before Christ, their accounts to submit,
How thou leddest thy life here, and keptest His laws,
What thou didst day by day, the doom will rehearse. 190
With a pokenful of pardons, or provincial letters,

Tho' ye're found in fraternity of all the four orders,
With indulgences doubled, save Do-well you help,
Your patents and pardons a pea-shell are worth !

So I counsel all Christians to cry for God's mercy, 195
Praying Mary His mother to mediate also,
That God give us grace now, before we go hence,
Such works for to work, e'en while we are here,
That, after our death-day, then Do-well may witness,
At the great day of doom, that we did as He bade. 200

NOTES AND INDEX

NOTES

NOTES TO THE PROLOGUE.

Line 1. *Soft*, mild. It seemed a pity to alter here this characteristic word.

14. It is explained afterwards (Pass. i, 12) that 'the tower on the hill-top' is the abode of Truth, or of God the Father. The 'dungeon' in l. 15 is the Castle of Care, or the abode of Satan. The 'fair field' in l. 17 represents the world, and 'the folk' are its inhabitants.

20. The poet describes the various classes of mankind. It is quite likely that Chaucer obtained from Langland the general idea for his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales; in which he describes these various classes in a still more vivid manner, by selecting in each case a single representative.

34. *Guiltless*. The poet accepts the fact that a few minstrels were honest; but their general reputation was bad, as he proceeds to make clear.

38. *Paul*. The text of St. Paul which Langland refers to, but does *not* quote, is written (in Latin) in the margin of the Oriel

MS. :—"If any would not work, neither should he eat;" 2 Thess. iii. 10. He says he will not quote it lest he should be regarded as a speaker of evil.

47. He refers to the frequent pilgrimages to the shrine of St. James at Compostella in Spain, and to various churches in Rome.

54. Our Lady's shrine, at Walsingham in Norfolk, was also a favourite place of pilgrimage. The 'milky way' was sometimes called 'Walsingham way,' because it is as full of stars as that road was of pilgrims.

58. *The four orders (of friars)*. These were the Carmelites (the white friars), the Augustines (Austin friars), the Jacobins or Dominicans (black friars), and the Minorites (gray friars).

64. I.e. since Love has turned pedlar. This alludes to the money received by friars for hearing confessions. Besides this, the friars actually resembled pedlars when they carried about with them knives and pins to give away to women; as Chaucer so clearly tells us.

67. *The most mischief*. Very great mischief resulted from the fact that the friars and the church (secular clergy) were so far from 'holding together,' that they quarrelled fiercely as to the (lucrative) right of hearing confessions. See Pass. V. 143; p. 72.

68. *A pardoner*. The pardoners sold pardons from Rome (see Chaucer), and the bishops sometimes licensed them to do so (l. 78); on which account the pardoner spoke well of the bishop (l. 80).

82. The money that might have gone to the poor was expended on pardons.

84. There were at least three terrible pestilences in the time

of Edward III., viz. in 1348-9, 1361-2, and 1369. The two first are alluded to in Pass. v. 13; p. 66. The 'great' pestilence of 1348-9 is probably referred to here. Many parish-priests deserted their parishes, and went to London, where some of them became chantry-priests, singing masses for the repose of rich men's souls. This is called 'simony' in l. 86.

92. The clergy often obtained secular offices, especially in the law, where learning was required. Some (l. 95) became chaplains or stewards to great lords.

94. *Ward-motes*; meetings of the men belonging to the *wards*, or divisions of the city of London.

101. The reference is to Matt. xvi. 19.

102. I. e. Peter deputed 'the power of the keys' to the four 'cardinal' virtues, named Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice. But it really came into the hands of the cardinals at Rome, who had power to elect a pope. In l. 104, the word *cardinal* is explained, by a sort of pun, as meaning 'the closing of gates,' or one that has power to close or to open. This refers to the etymological sense, as the Latin *cardinalis* meant, literally, 'of or pertaining to a door-hinge,' from *cardo* (gen. *cardin-is*), a hinge. Then it came to mean 'that upon which a thing hinges, turns, or depends,' i. e. principal, chief; as the cardinal points of the compass, the cardinal or chief presbyters or bishops; and finally, the bishops belonging to the council of the pope.

113. Observe this remarkable line.

123. It is probable that by the lunatic, the author refers sarcastically to himself. At any rate, ll. 125-7 certainly express his own opinions, as recorded elsewhere.

132-8. These lines, in the original, are in Latin; but they

do not appear to be quoted. They seem to be Langland's own.

144. The commons did not pretend to know much Latin, but they knew as much as was good for them to know, in order to express their submission and loyalty.

146. This well-known fable is told here as well as anywhere. The 'rats' are the great burgesses of London, and the 'mice' those of lesser importance. The 'cat' is Edward III., in the last year of his reign (1377), when his son, the Black Prince, was dead, and the heir, his grandson, was a 'kitten,' as in l. 190.

161. These 'chains' or 'collars' can still be seen at times, as worn by the lord mayor and sheriffs.

191. The quotation is from Ecclesiastes, x. 16. All such quotations are given, in the original, in Latin, as they stand in the 'Vulgate' version by St. Jerome.

201. 'Such a mischief' did actually 'follow'; for there was a rebellion, under Wat Tyler, in 1381; only four years later.

211. The allusion is to the law-sergeants, who expect a fee before they plead.

224. *Dieu vous save*; 'God save you, dame Emma'; the refrain of a popular song, like 'Oh! Susannah' in modern times. They sang songs instead of doing their work. In Passus xiii. l. 340, there is an allusion to 'dame Emma of Shoreditch,' which was not a reputable locality.

225. Lydgate describes how the keepers of cook-shops stood in the shop-door, touting for custom. In the same way the taverners cried out the names of their wines, and invited customers to come in.

NOTES TO PASSUS I.

3. The lady is Holy-Church, the daughter of Truth or of God the Father.

15. The five wits are the five senses, hearing, sight, taste, scent, and feeling.

20. *Three things*. 'The chief thing for life is water, and bread, and clothing'; Ecclesiasticus, xxix. 21.

47. The reference is to Matt. xxii. 20.

59. *The dungeon*; referring to Prol. l. 15; p. 4.

68. There was a common tradition that Judas hanged himself on a branch of an elder-tree. Shakespeare alludes to it in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act. v. sc. 2. l. 610.

76. *Received thee*, i. e. at baptism.

86. Alluding to 1 John, iv. 8.

91. 'My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it'; Luke, viii. 21.

102. 'Then David received them, and made them captains of the band'; 1 Chron. xii. 18.

104. An apostate was one who quitted his order *after* he had completed the year of his noviciate.

105. It was usual to reckon *nine* orders of angels, called cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels, and angels; here called 'cherubs and

seraphs, and seven more.' But it was said that there was once a *tenth* order, or 'one other,' viz. the (original) brightest order of all, of which Lucifer was chief; but this order rebelled, and was cast out of heaven; see ll. 111-114, which is founded on Isaiah, xiv. 12-15; the name of Lucifer being supposed to refer to Satan.

119. 'Nine days they fell'; Milton, *Par. Lost*, vi. 871.

132. The 'texts' are Matt. xxii. 20 (see l. 51) and 1 John, iv. 8 (see l. 86).

139. The line here quoted is given in Latin in the original, and runs thus: 'Hei mihi, quod sterilem duxi vitam iuvenilem.' Probably it is Langland's own; it recurs in *Pass.* v. 448 (p. 86).

153. The reference is to the Incarnation.

178. Because children sometimes weep at baptism.

187. It refers to the parable of the ten virgins.

NOTES TO PASSUS II.

20. *Meed*; i. e. Reward; but here used in a bad sense, as the personification of Bribery.

58. *Assize-men*, assisors; men who constituted the assize or inquest; whence the modern jury originated. *Sumners*, summoners; men who were employed to warn offenders to appear in court.

60. *Purveyors*. The original has 'Foregoeres and vitailleurs.' These were the purveyors, who went before a king or great lord in his progress, and bought up provisions for himself and

his retinue. They often used much oppression, exacting provisions at a cheap rate, and sometimes forgetting to pay for them.

60. The Court of Arches was the ecclesiastical court of appeal for the province of Canterbury, formerly held at the church of St. Mary-le-Bow (or 'of the Arches'), so named from the arches that supported the steeple.

65. *Broker* is here used in the sense of a contriver of bargains, a match-maker.

74. This mock-charter imitates the legal style.

108. What is meant by 'the Pauline order' is not precisely known; one authority identifies the Paulines with the minor order of friars usually known as the Crutched Friars.

109. *Bat*, short for Bartholomew. The names here given are doubtless fictitious; but we may suspect that, at the time, they referred to real individuals. A *soken*, in l. 110, is a district within which certain lords had the privilege of administering justice.

122. Quoted from Luke, x. 7.

143. Edward III., in 1343, coined *florins*, of the value of 6s. 8d. apiece.

169. *Sumners*. See note to l. 58 above.

170. *Provisors*. A provisor was one who had the right, gained by mandate of the pope, to be in the future presented to a benefice not vacant at the time of the grant. The mandate, it is suggested, could be obtained by a bribe. See Pass. III. 146 (p. 44).

174. *Be saddled with*; referring to their acceptance of bribes,

enabling those who paid to be exempted from punishment for open sins.

177. *Paulines*; see note to l. 108 above.

179. *Cart-saddle*, i. e. put a cart-saddle upon. A cart-saddle is the small saddle on the back of a cart-horse, to support the shafts. *Commissary*, an officer who exercises jurisdiction as the representative of a bishop in parts of his diocese.

212. The kindly reception given to Guile and Liar by shopmen and pardoners shows a keen touch of satire.

NOTES TO PASSUS III

12. *Westminster*; where the law-courts were. Cf. Pass. ii. 160 (p. 32).

45. The 'noble' of Edward III. was worth 6s. 8d., and was coined in gold.

46. *Beadsman*; a pensioner charged with the duty of praying for his benefactor's soul.

58. The seven sins are all described in Passus V.

63. *Sister*; one to whom 'letters of fraternity' were granted by a convent or order; these letters entitled benefactors to a share in the benefits of its prayers and good works.

76. *Mace-men*, mace-bearers; officers of the courts of justice who carried maces.

93. *Solomon*; this is a slip, as the quotation is from the book of Job.

95. The quotation from Job is in Latin, as usual; hence ll. 97-99 give a loose translation of it.

126. *Your father*; the unfortunate Edward II. Cf. l. 186.

157. A *love-day* was a day appointed for the amicable settlement of a dispute. It is evidently suggested here that, on such an occasion, bribes were not wholly ineffective.

188. *Normandy*. The allusion is to the treaty of Brétigny, near Chartres, in 1360. Edward consented to renounce his claim to the crown of France for the sum of 3,000,000 crowns of gold. Meed suggests that this was a cowardly proceeding, and that the English had been frightened by the bad weather that prevailed, the cold being extreme.

233. The text is quoted in Latin; hence its explanation in English, in ll. 234-5.

257. See 1 Sam. xv. The first book of Samuel was also known as the first book of *Kings*.

299. This prophecy apparently anticipates the millenium.

315. The *pannel* of a jury is the slip of parchment on which the names of the jurors were written. It is also spelt *panel*.

323. Here follows a fanciful prophecy which admits of no precise explanation. L. 324 is intentionally mysterious. A similar prophecy was made by John of Bridlington, at about the same date; see Wright's *Political Poems*, vol. i.

325. *The middle of a moon*; the Paschal full moon.

332, 345. From Prov. xxii. 9, in the Vulgate version. Our English version differs.

NOTES TO PASSUS IV.

45. *His son*; the Black Prince. This line first appeared in the earliest version of the present poem, written about 1362, and is here retained, as a general expression of a place of dignity, although the Black Prince died just before the revision of the work.

48. *Wrong*; a type of the wealthy overbearing man, who robs his poorer neighbours without remorse.

58. Sometimes a wealthy man, instead of paying money, would promise payment by giving a tally. The tally was a stick or rod (one of a pair) with notches upon it to mark the sum lent. The other tally, with similar notches on it, was retained by the buyer. It was often difficult for the seller to realise the money.

121. *Bennet*; St. Benedict, founder of the Benedictine order of monks, who died about 542. St. Bernard, of Clairvaux, founder of the Cistercian order, died in 1153. St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order of friars, or the friars Minorites, died in 1226.

126. Reason suggests that pilgrims, instead of seeking the shrine of St. James in Galicia, had better go to places which he would point out himself, such as the homes of those who are in distress. Those who go to Galicia may as well remain there, as they do no good.

128. In 1376, the commons presented a petition to the king, stating that the sums which they annually paid to the pope amounted to five times the royal revenue; and it was proposed to put a stop to this.

143. Quoted from pope Innocent III., *De Contemptu Mundi*, bk. iii. ch. 15.

156. *Fail*; i. e. having received his bribe, he found himself unable to plead against Bribery.

NOTES TO PASSUS V.

9. Here begins the second vision, in which the poet sees Reason, who preaches to the people.

13. He showed that the pestilences of 1348-9, 1361-2, and 1369 were God's judgements upon them for their sins.

14. *Southwest wind*. It is on record that there was a violent tempest on Jan. 15, 1362, which fell upon a Saturday. It began about the time of vespers, or the evening service, and lasted for five days, causing much destruction.

28. The passage is difficult; but it seems to mean that Tom Stow's wife had been ducked for a scold, and that he had better fight for and rescue her, and bring her home.

31. *Her head*; i. e. her head-covering. A half mark was worth 6*s.* 8*d.*, or more than five pounds in modern coinage. A *groat* was fourpence, worth now some five shillings.

32. *Bat*, Bartholomew; Betty was probably his daughter.

36. Owing to the numerous deaths from pestilence, many children were too much indulged and spoilt.

38. An old proverb; in the Proverbs of Hending, written about 1300, we find *Luuf child lore byhoueth*, a dear child needs teaching.

47. *Commons*; provisions for a community, especially for a monastic establishment. We still speak of 'short commons.'

57. *Seek to*. I use this in the Biblical sense, to resort to. 'All the earth *sought to* Solomon;' 1 Kings, x. 24.

59. The usual ending for a sermon referring to the Holy Spirit would naturally be:—'Who with the Father and the Son,' &c. He breaks off abruptly.

62. *Will*; i. e. either the human will, or (more probably) the author himself. He calls himself plain 'Will' in some other passages; his name being William.

63. Here follow the 'Confessions' of the Seven Deadly Sins, each of which is here personified. Pride is represented by a female, named Parnel Proud-heart. Parnel was then a very common female name.

74. Even in those days there was a frequent habit of getting drunk on a Saturday evening. The penitent says he will henceforth drink water.

92. *Gib*; short for Gilbert, then a common name.

93. A *wey* of Essex cheese weighed three hundredweight.

108. *Bowl*; a wooden bowl, of small value.

138. In his character of gardener, Wrath grafted 'lying tales' upon limitors and lectors; i. e. he taught them how to lie. A 'limitor' was a member of a convent to whom a certain limit or beat was assigned, within which he begged from all its inhabitants. A 'lector' or reader occupied the second place (in ascending order) among the seven orders in the church, exclusive of the bishop, which contained the ostiary (door-keeper), lector, exorcist, acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon and priest.

143. The quarrel between the parish-priest and the friar as to the (lucrative) right to hear confessions was a chief source of wrath.

158. *Their broth*; i. e. their chief sustenance was to repeat scandalous tales.

166. Gregory IX. severely condemned abbesses who heard their nuns' confessions. He died in 1241.

205. There was a celebrated fair at Weyhill, near Andover, at Hampshire, which lasted eight days, beginning on Oct. 11. It still exists.

224. The best ale was sold at fourpence a gallon; the thinnest, or weakest, at a penny. Rose the hostess asked the highest price for the ale which was so carefully reserved; and took the further precaution of drawing it in small cups that could not conveniently be measured.

230. Avarice vows to go on pilgrimage to our Lady's shrine at Walsingham in Norfolk. He could easily, on the same journey, visit the famous rood at Bromholm in the same county.

238. Avarice explains that he did not exactly know the meaning of the French word 'restitution.' He was no scholar, and knew nothing of such French as was still, to some extent, spoken in England. Norfolk was one of the places where it was practically extinct.

242. Lombards and Jews were the chief money-lenders. They were often accused of clipping the coin. Avarice explains that, after he had pared or clipped such coins as were of very good weight, he used to lend these coins, on consideration of receiving a valuable pledge. He did not want to be repaid; but only to have the pledged article finally forfeited to him.

251. He took money to Rome by means of bills given by Lombards; and he received the money according to a tally, so that the exact amount of it was known to the banker. But when he came to Rome, he counted it out at a less amount.

274, 275. Two lines in Latin, of which I give the sense.

279. The original line is in Latin; quoted from St. Augustine.

283. *Miserere-mei* (Have mercy upon me) is the name of the fifty-first Psalm, because it begins with that phrase. He then quotes the sixth verse of it.

285. *Cum sancto*, &c.; i. e. with the holy thou shalt be holy; as given below.

291. The Latin quotation resembles a passage in St. Augustine.

311. This is admirable. Glutton is on his way to church, when he passes the ale-house door, and the hostess invites him to come in. By way of feeble resistance, he asks if she has any hot spices to put in the drink. On being assured that she has, he at once yields, being deterred from his pious intention by the prospect of tasting some pepper, some pæony-seed (used partly in medicine, and partly as a spice), and a farthing-worth of fennel-seed, strictly reserved for fasting-days, when an extra spice was particularly acceptable. The day was, in fact, a Friday, as we learn from l. 367. That farthing-worth of fennel-seed was just too much for his pious resolves.

319. The company was not select. Cock-lane, West Smithfield, was the resort of women of ill fame, many of whom came from Flanders, as noted in l. 321.

322. A *raker* was a scavenger, who raked the dirt from the streets. I use *rider* in the sense of 'groom'; the original has *redyng-kyng*, the sense of which is unknown.

327. Allusion is made here to a kind of bargaining which was sometimes called handicapping, and was evidently encouraged for the amusement of the company. Clement began by offering to exchange his cloak. Hick accepted the challenge, by offering his hood, which was of less value; and each party chose friends who took his part. It was agreed that Clement, who was to get the hood, would have to receive some 'amends' for accepting the less valuable article. But they could not fix the amount till they called in an umpire. The umpire pleased the company by deciding that Clement need not receive money, but should be content with Hick's ordering more ale 'to fill up his cup.' If either refused to abide by this decision, he was to be fined a gallon of ale for the benefit of Sir Glutton, who was the principal man amongst them; in fact, he is the Falstaff of this dramatic scene.

344. "Let go the cup;" i. e. pass it round.

353. *A gleeman's dog*; i. e. a dog who led a blind minstrel, and went about as it pleased.

361. *Caudle*, a warm drink of thin gruel, mixed with wine or ale, and sweetened or spiced.

397. *Benedicite*, i. e. bless you! It is here an interjection, used as a kind of greeting.

402. This is the earliest mention of rhymes about Robin Hood. Randolph, earl of Chester, was of similar repute; he was once released from prison by a rabble of minstrels, a class of men of indifferent reputation, to whom he had shown favour.

407. *Bid any beads*, pray any prayers.

411. It must be noted that Sloth had once been himself ordained priest; see l. 422.

413. *Summer-games* were what are now better known as athletic sports.

423. *Sol-fa*, sing[~] by notes; *sol* and *fa* refer, respectively, to the fifth and fourth notes in the musical scale.

425. He could more easily find a hare than construe and explain a verse in the Latin psalter. Psalm 1 and Psalm 128 were named, respectively, *Beatus-vir* (blessed is the man) and *Beati-omnes* (blessed are all), from the first words that occur in them.

448. The original line is in Latin, as already quoted; see Pass. i. 139 (p. 21), and the note.

450. *Vigilate*, i. e. 'watch ye'; here used as the name of a kindly curate, who assists Repentance in the task of trying to redeem Sloth.

467. The rood or cross at Chester was once famous. The base of it can still be seen on the open space once called the *Rood-eye* or 'rood-island,' but now pronounced as *Roodee*, and often absurdly associated with the river Dee, which happens to flow near it.

469. *Robert* was often used as a name for a thief, owing to its sounding like *robber*.

473. Dismas was the traditional name of the penitent thief.

482. *Penitence* is here made the name of the robber's pike-staff, or pointed staff shod with iron, which he was to use in his pilgrimages to holy places.

491. *O happy fault!* The original Latin is quoted from the Sarum missal, from a canticle sung upon Holy Saturday at the blessing of the Paschal candle.

498. *In our suit, i. e.* in his human nature only.

500. *The meal-time of saints.* This refers to the mass, as being celebrated near mid-day.

501. The text from Isaiah was explained as referring to the descent of Christ into hell, when the saints who had previously died were taken up to heaven; as told in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus.

504. *In our suit, i. e.* again in human form.

505. Mary Magdalene was formerly identified with 'the woman who was a sinner.' There is nothing to show this.

514. The horn is supposed to be named *Thou-shalt-quicken-us-again*; and the blast which it blew was *blessed, &c.* It is a bold way of introducing the texts.

524. This is a famous description of a palmer, who was no uncommon sight at that date. A palmer was one who was continually on pilgrimage to various shrines; a pilgrim made one special journey only, to some particular shrine. Thus the Canterbury pilgrims went to Canterbury only.

527. The palmer carried on his hat little vials called *ampullæ*, which contained holy water or holy oil. They were small and flat. He also carried *signs*, i. e. special tokens connected with particular shrines. The *shells* were a token that he had been to the shrine of St. James in Galicia. The *vernicle* was a copy of the handkerchief of St. Veronica, upon which (as was said) the exact features of Christ were miraculously impressed.

570. The way to Truth's abode is to begin with Meekness and Conscience, to love God and one's neighbour, to be courtly, and to keep the ten commandments. The ten commandments are variously described. Thus the fifth is typified by a ford (576), near to which is the third (579); next, a

croft which typifies the tenth (582); two stocks, typifying the eight and the sixth (586); then comes the fourth (588), and a barrow or tumulus representing the ninth (589).

611. *The woman*, i. e. Eve. The door of Paradise was closed by Eve; but the Virgin Mary re-opened it.

632. *Largesse*, i. e. Bounty or Liberality.

640. *Ape-ward*, one who kept an ape, and showed him about to get a living.

641. *Wafer-man* or *waferer*; equivalent to the modern 'confectioner.' But waferers had a bad reputation, and were credited with being go-betweens who promoted secret assignations.

644. *Mercy*; here identified with the Virgin Mary.

NOTES TO PASSUS VI.

4. *Half-acre*; a common term for a small field.

7. *Let*, i. e. hinder; somewhat obsolescent.

11. *Sendal*; a kind of thin rich silk.

12. *Chasuble*, a kind of sleeveless mantle covering the body and shoulders, worn over the alb and stole by the celebrant at the mass or the eucharist.

25. *Ye* was used as a term of respect; *thou* was used in a more familiar manner. The abrupt change here, from *ye* in l. 25, to the succeeding *thy*, occurs in the original.

31. *Brocks*, badgers, which the knight was to hunt.

40. *Amerce*, fine them ; presumably for some fault.
50. *Charnel*, burial-place ; where it is difficult to tell a knight from a poor man, their skeletons being alike.
61. *Cobbled*. The original has *clouted*, i. e. patched.
64. *Breadcorn*, corn ready to be ground, to make bread. But some of it is here used for sowing.
92. *Remission of rental*, a release from the rent that is recorded in the rent-roll.
102. There was a famous cross at Lucca, to the west of Florence.
105. The plough-foot was a piece of wood formerly used to regulate the depth to which the coulter of the plough should go. Piers uses a plough-foot instead of a pike-staff, which was a staff fitted with a spike and used as a walking-stick.
114. *High prime* ; apparently 9 A.M.
118. That is, all the help they gave was to sing songs with a chorus.
150. *Robert*, i. e. thief ; see note to Pass. v. 469.
156. *Breton* ; here used (as in l. 178) as a term of contempt.
167. *Waster*, a spendthrift ; who at the same time earned nothing.
179. *Like a lantern* ; as pale as a lantern made of horn.
217. Horses and hounds were formerly fed with bread : see l. 196.

234. The book of Genesis is here appealed to. It is called *the giant*, perhaps with reference to its importance. But the sense of the epithet is not obvious, and the use of 'giant' was probably suggested by a need for alliteration with *Genesis*. *Engenderer of us all* was probably suggested by the same necessity; it means the book which gives an account of the origin of mankind. The reference is to Gen. iii. 19.

237. *Sapience*, the book of Wisdom. But it is a slip; for the reference is to the book of Proverbs.

240. The evangelist Matthew was often likened to a man (sometimes represented by a *man's face* only); Mark, to a lion; Luke, to a bull; and John, to an eagle.

251. The 'contemplative life' is that of the man who serves God spiritually; and the 'active life,' that of him who serves God bodily. The monk and the ploughman are types.

252. Psalm 128 begins (in the Latin) with *Beati omnes*, blessed are all they.

291. *Lammas-time*, the beginning of August. Aug. 1 was called Lammas, or Lammas day.

293. *Dight thee*, prepare for thee.

307. *Halfpenny-ale*; ale of the poorest quality, at a halfpenny a gallon. See note to Pass v. 224. Cf. l. 311.

316. *Cato*; Dionysius Cato, the author of a Latin work in four books, consisting of lines in couplets, and giving advice to the young. The line meant is from bk. i., couplet 21:—*'Paupertatis onus patienter ferre memento.'*

324. *Water*; i. e. great floods. See l. 326.

327. *Saturn*. The planet Saturn was supposed to portend disaster.

328. A mysterious prophecy, perhaps meant to be wholly enigmatical.

330. *Death*, i. e. the pestilence, shall cease; but *Dearth*, i. e. famine, shall still be judge

NOTES TO PASSUS VII.

3. *From pain and from guilt.* The Latin phrase was *a pœna et a culpa.*

14. *Legists*; men well versed in the law. *Both laws*; both the canon law and the civil law.

33. It was thought that St. Michael protected the dying man from devils, and conducted his soul to the judgement-seat of Christ.

43. The quotation is given in Latin. I do not know whence it comes. It resembles the text—'He shall receive honour of the king;' Ecclesiasticus, xxxviii. 2.

44. *Jack*; i. e. any common fellow.

73. Prefixed to Cato's couplets (see note to Pass. vi. l. 316) are some short sentences. One of these is:—'cui des, videto,' take heed to whom you give. By 'the clerk of the stories' is meant Peter Comestor, author of the *Historica Scholastica*. The passage referred to is one in which Peter Comestor abridges a passage in the book of *Tobit*, iv. 7-17.

76. Gregory the Great. But the passage seems rather to be taken from St. Jerome's Commentary on Ecclesiastes, ch. xi.

86. This quotation is from St. Jerome, Epistle cxxv.

111. The reference is to Matt. xxv. 46.
126. 'Be not anxious.' The A. V. has—'Take no thought.'
135. The priest sarcastically observes that Piers might take as his text :—'The *fool* hath said.'
150. 'Take no heed of dreams'; from Dionysius Cato, bk. ii. couplet 31.
170. *Biennial*, a series of masses said for a departed soul during a period of two years. *Triennial*, the same for three years.
191. A *provincial*, in some monastic orders, was a superior who superintended the fraternity within a district called a *province*. I suppose that a provincial letter was a letter of recognition or commendation from such a superior. See the next note.
192. Letters of 'fraternity' were granted by a convent or order to its benefactors, entitling those named in it to be partakers in the benefits of its prayers and good works. A benefactor might thus be enrolled as a brother in every one of the four orders of friars. See note to Pass. iii. 63.

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